Bandwagon

The Journal of the Circus Historical Society Vol. 62 No. 1 2018

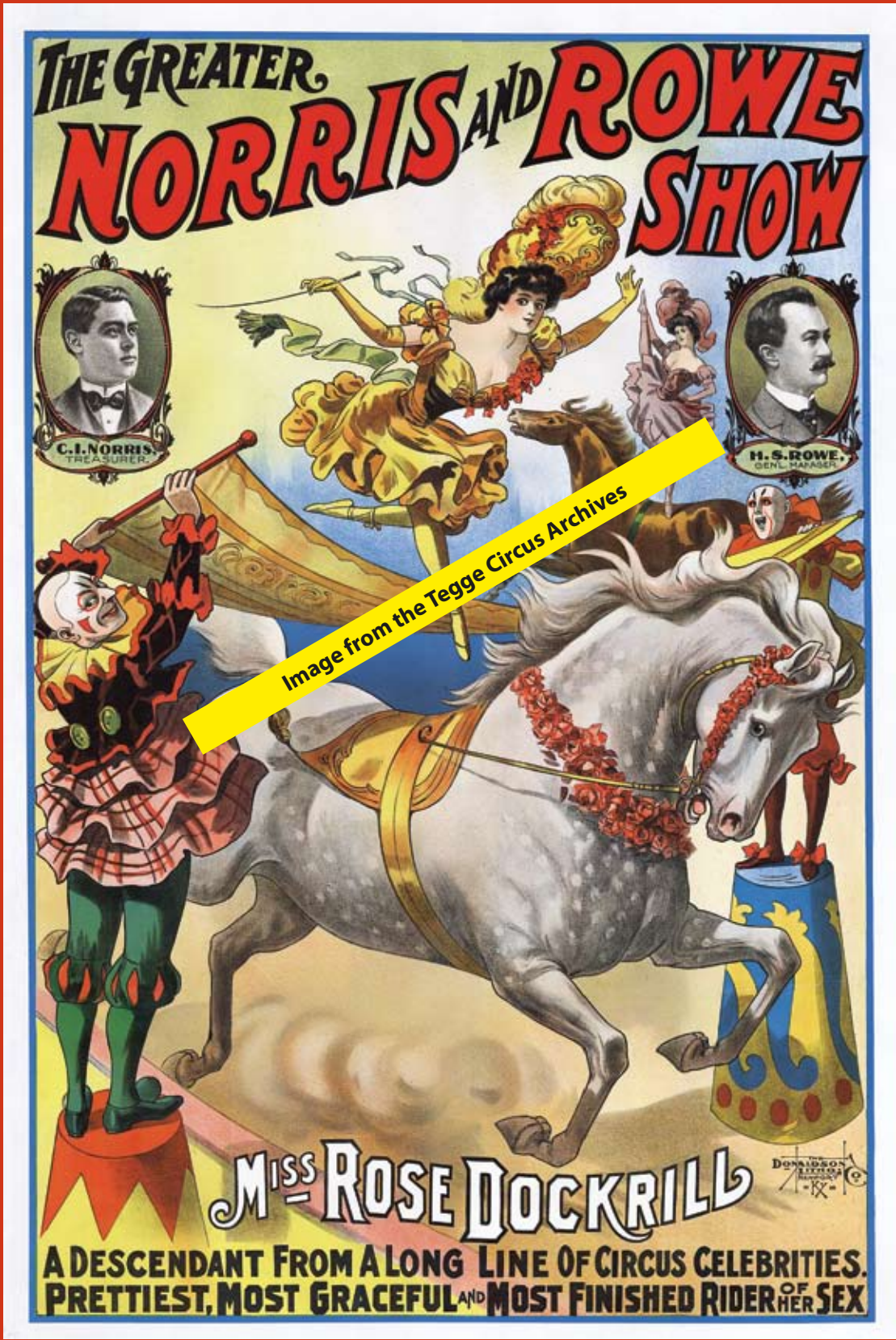

Image from the Tegge Circus Archives

Circus Historical Society seeks submissions for Stuart Thayer Prize

The Circus Historical Society is seeking submissions for this year's Stuart Thayer Prize. The prize annually recognizes a superior work in circus history and is named in honor of Stuart Thayer, the author of numerous foundational and insightful works published about the antebellum American circus and menagerie.

Note: *the eligibility criteria as posted on the Circus Historical Society website is out of date. Please refer to this announcement and form for current submissions.*

Eligibility Criteria

Content A nominated work must be substantially about American circus history or a very closely related topic.

Format Works may be in any printed form: book, article, pamphlet, booklet, bibliography, compendium of essays, exhibit, a single essay that is part of a larger work, or an original work contained in digital format on a disk or loaded on a permanent website.

Posthumous publication Works by deceased authors being published posthumously for the first time are eligible for nomination. The prize shall be awarded to the closest survivor or an immediate family representative, or to a representative of the organization that accomplished the publication.

Exclusions Exhibits, websites, symposiums, etc., that do not issue a permanent document or are not archived in some permanent format are not eligible for nomination. Fictional works are not eligible. Simple reprintings and new editions of older works, without annotation or other updating that substantially improve the value of the work are not eligible for nomination. Virtual and digital library content and activity are not eligible for nomination.

Release date A work published, issued or released within 2 (two) calendar years prior to the prize year is eligible for nomination.

Nominators Any current member in good standing of the Circus Historical Society may nominate one or more works for the Prize. Officers, board members and members of the prize committee who are CHS members may nominate works. Members may nominate their own works for the prize.

Two pillars of the Circus Historical Society were Fred Pfening, Jr. (left), who served as editor of Bandwagon *for nearly 50 years, and Stuart Thayer, in honor of whom the Stuart Thayer Prize was established. Both individuals spent a lifetime pursuing circus history and sharing their research with others.*

Nominations submission Nominations may be submitted in hard copy, by fax, or email delivered scan. Each nomination must be signed and dated by the nominator.

Deadline All nominations must be submitted no later than April 30. The prize will be awarded at the CHS convention in Baraboo, Wisconsin in July 2018.

To apply please include the nominator's contact information, as well as the ***author, title***, and ***publication date*** of the work nominated. The application must also include a brief statement that advocates why the nominated work is worthy of the Prize. Please refer to aspects of cutting edge scholarship, new content, advances in knowledge, superior or new research technique, or other features embodied in the work.

Submit nominations to

Stuart Thayer Prize Committee
Circus World
Pete Shrake
550 Water St.
Baraboo, WI 53913

or email to <pshrake@circusworldbaraboo.org>.

Bandwagon

The Journal of the Circus Historical Society

2018 Volume 62, Number 1

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Membership Rate

Circus Historical Society membership is $60.00 annually in the United States, $80.00 annually in Canada, and $85.00 annually for international members. Membership application and information are available on the CHS website at www.circushistory.org or by contacting the Bandwagon office.

Website and Back Issues

An index of *Bandwagon* articles from earlier issues is available online at www.circushistory.org. Back issues are available from the Office of Publication.

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Circus Historical Society

circushistory.org

Mission Statement

"To preserve, promote, and share through education the history and cultural significance of the circus and allied arts, past and present."

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From the Editor

My subscription to *Bandwagon* began in 1959, and I joined the Circus Historical Society five years later when I was 13 years old. Despite these long-ago starting points, I recognize that I am a first-of-May as your new editor. Although I have much to learn, I am certainly thrilled to be "on the road" with all who share a passion for the circus and its history.

This issue of our journal begins with two excellent articles by Chris Berry. In the first of these, Chris explores the amazing work of Leslie Jones who photographed the Boston circus scene during the early decades of the 20th century. Shifting from the East Coast to the West Coast, Chris provides us with a blockbuster article that traces 60 years of circus visits to the legendary Los Angeles showgrounds known as Washington and Hill.

The story of the Erie Lithograph & Printing Company is recounted in Pete Shrake's wonderful overview of this firm and the circus poster art it created. Pete's survey has been illustrated with a magnificent selection of colorful Erie artwork from Circus World Museum's collection. *Bandwagon* will highlight similar treasures from other collections in the future.

In 1954 when I was four years old, my father took me to see Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey in Davenport, Iowa. I have fleeting memories of that dreamlike day on the banks of the Mississippi. That was the only time I ever saw the show when it toured under canvas. The matinee included Pinito del Oro's trapeze act, but regrettably, I have no memory of seeing the stellar aerialist perform that day. When I learned that Pinito had died late last year, I resolved to write about her amazing circus career. That story appears in these pages.

In the grand finale of this publication, David SaLoutos delivers a special treat as he analyzes the music written by John Ringling North for his circus productions. Dave's incredible insights and musical expertise have resulted in a vivid assessment of North's creations. You can almost hear the songs as Dave brings to life the magical last tented editions of *The Greatest Show on Earth*.

As I embark on my journey as editor, I want to thank those who have provided me with Jumbo-size support. Fred Dahlinger contributed historical information, assisted with content review and helped in more ways that I could possibly list. John and Mardi Wells once again demonstrated their extraordinary graphic design skills. Pete Shrake went the extra mile in scanning and transferring the majority of the images that appear in this issue. Julie Parkinson shared ideas and helped in many significant ways. Jennifer Lemmer Posey passed the editor's baton with grace and professionalism. Fred Pfening was also generous with his time and knowledge.

Ladies and gentlemen…children of all ages…let me invite you to step back in time to the circus of yesterday. I hope you enjoy the show!

About the covers

The front cover features a rare and truly magnificent Norris and Rowe lithograph from the Tegge Circus Archives in Baraboo, Wisconsin. This exceptional poster depicting Miss Rose Dockrill's banner leaping performance was designed and printed by Donaldson Lithograph Co., most likely for the season of 1905.

Rozelle E. "Rose" Dockrill (1875-1966) was born into a family of circus riders from Delevan, Wisconsin. Dockrill's fame as an exquisite equestrienne flourished during three seasons with Ringling Bros. Circus beginning in 1896. She performed with Walter L. Main in 1899, Adam Forepaugh & Sells Bros. in 1900, and then John Robinson's Circus in 1901. In November of that year, Dockrill married another accomplished, Delevan heritage circus rider, George E. Holland (1875-1960). Thereafter, they contracted for both individual and duo presentations with their snow-white horses.

The Greater Norris and Rowe Show was organized in Seattle, Washington in 1900. The two-ring, one stage railroad circus met with considerable success during its initial seasons touring primarily in the western and Great Lakes states. During the last week of the 1904 season, the Dockrill-Holland riding duo joined Norris and Rowe in Monterey, California (*Billboard,* December 17, 1904, p. 17). They were featured with the show throughout 1905, a season which ended with five weeks in Mexico. In the fall of that year, the show's owners purchased land in Santa Cruz, California where they built a new winter quarters.

The Norris and Rowe Circus midway in Vancouver, British Columbia, 1908. City of Vancouver Archives

In the fall of 1906 the young circus riders left Norris and Rowe and moved on to perform with other circuses. They returned to Norris and Rowe for parts of the 1908 season, which began with an indoor date in San Francisco in January. They were also back again with the show for the complete 1909 tour. However, the show's popularity had begun to diminish. It encountered financial difficulty throughout the year and closed in October in Indiana, quartering in Evansville for the winter.

The 22 car show embarked the next spring without the Dockrill-Holland act – the riders deciding to accept an offer with the Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus. For Norris and Rowe it would be a short season. The ill-fated show opened in Evansville on April 18. Poor business resulted from three weeks of snow and rain in Kentucky, and the enterprise simply ran out of cash. While setting up in Newport, Kentucky on May 9, the circus was attached by Donaldson Litho., the company having not been paid for poster deliveries for quite some time. That was the end of the road for Norris and Rowe. The show's equipment was shipped to Peru, Indiana and sold at separate auctions in June and August of 1910.

On the back cover is a studio photograph of Rose Dockrill taken at the pinnacle of her career as a circus equestrienne.

GTP

CHS Newsletter

The Circus Historical Society newsletter, *News and Views,* is distributed electronically four times each year to CHS members and *Bandwagon* subscribers. It is no longer available in paper form. If you did not receive the January newsletter, or if your email address has changed, please notify the Newsletter Editor, Bob Cline, whose email address is <5Tiger-act@gmail.com>. Information and inquiries can also be sent to the Newsletter Editor.

THE CIRCUS HISTORICAL SOCIETY, INC. PRESENTS

NEWS & VIEWS

Bringing Circus Past and Present Together!

The Circus Historical Society Newsletter — Vol. 9, No. 1, February, 2018

Bob Cline – Newsletter Editor — www.circushistory.org — Chris Berry – Co-Editor

"Our Mission is to Preserve, Promote and Share through Education, the history and cultural significance of the circus & the allied arts, past and present."

CIRCUS HARMONY RECEIVES GRANT FROM CIRQUE DU SOLIEL

November 27, 2017 (St. Louis, MO) – Circus Harmony was thrilled to receive an email that said "Because we recognize the importance of your work in the community, we are pleased to inform you that Circus Harmony will be the recipient of our 2017 Cirque du Monde Grant in the amount of $10,000" This is a grant given to just three American organizations who use "Social Circus as a method of intervention with youth in difficulty."

Cirque du Soleil Entertainment Group has chosen the cause of youth at risk and has developed several programs over time that each offer various avenues of support. Cirque du Monde, is one of them. It combines circus techniques with educational social intervention to help young people. Social circus aims to help these youth get their self-confidence back, make them realize their strengths and discover their hidden talents.

As St. Louis' only social circus, Circus Harmony does just that. This small, grassroots non-profit uses circus arts to build character in individuals and bridges between communities through their Peace Through Pyramids, Circus Teaches the Art of Life and other programs. By inspiring individuals and connecting communities with their circus education and entertainment programs, they have a positive impact on the St. Louis area and beyond.

In separate but connected news, Circus Harmony announced that two of their alumni, Sabey 'Bing' Bateman and Melvin Diggs will be joining Cirque du Soleil as performers on the show, Luzia! These young men have embodied Circus Harmony's mission statement to help young people "defy gravity, soar with confidence and leap over social barriers, all at the same time."

Circus Harmony's Artistic/Executive director, Jessica Hunstiff, said, "We are thankful to Cirque du Monde for honoring us by supporting their work and Cirque du Soleil for recognizing the talents of our alumni. We invite everyone to come see our current generation of flying children and witness some of the work that Cirque du Monde is supporting in our weekly shows at City Museum.

More information on our classes, shows, and programs can be found on our website at www.circusharmony.org.

Leslie Jones:

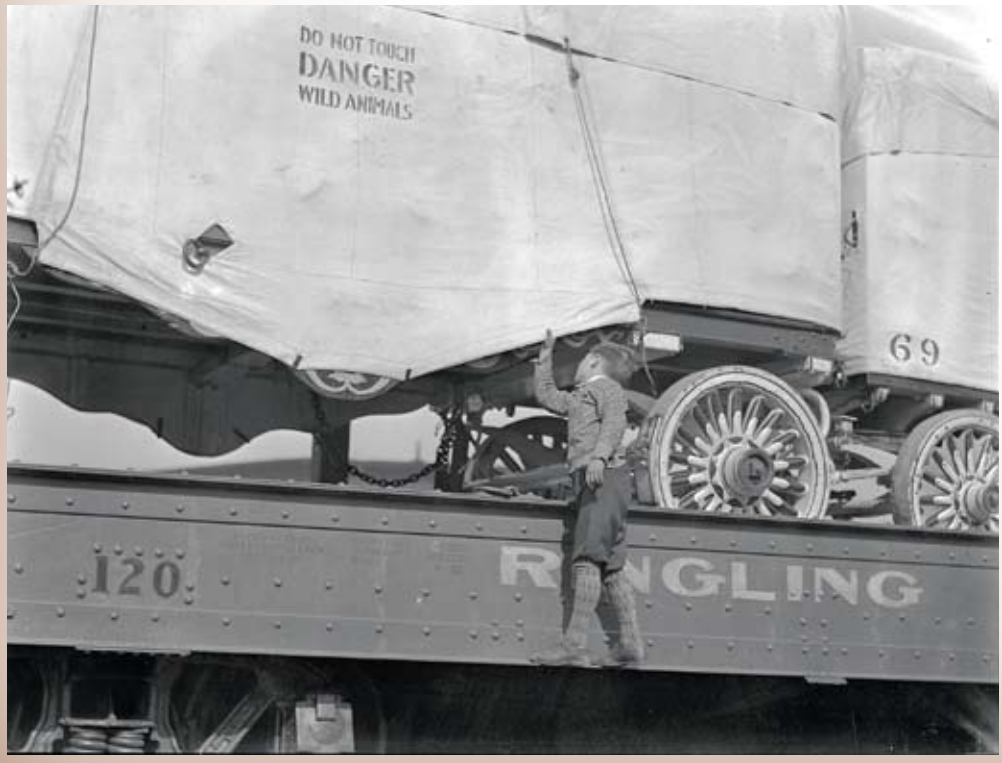
Artist with a Graflex

by Chris Berry

All of the photographs in this article are being used courtesy of the Boston Public Library, Leslie Jones Collection.

Many thanks to Bob Cullum, Fred Dahlinger, Karen Shafts, and Dominic Yodice for their assistance on this project.

Leslie Jones (1886-1967) was a photographer for the Boston Herald-Traveler *newspaper from 1917 to 1956. Born in Cotuit, Massachusetts he became interested in photography while still in school. After losing two fingers in an industrial accident he joined the newspaper staff, spending 39 years there where he was assigned to cover hundreds of news events in Boston and the surrounding area including circus appearances.*



In late April 1931 Leslie Jones recorded the Boston arrival of Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey, which had just wrapped up nearly a month engagement at Madison Square Garden in New York. That morning Jones snapped the usual assortment of wagons and animals being unloaded, then staged this scene of a youngster peeking under the canvas and into a cage wagon. In doing so he created a story that could not be captured simply in words.

In the early 1900s, the nation's newspapers began assigning photographers to capture history as it unfolded. Although high-speed film and telephoto lenses were still decades away, news stories were now often accompanied by timely images that could take the reader to the scene of the story.

One of the most prolific of those early "news cameramen" was Leslie Jones, a photographer for the *Boston Herald-Traveler,* who first began taking pictures for the newspaper in 1917. By the time he retired in 1956 he had amassed a collection of nearly 40,000 negatives that are now part of the Boston Public Library Print Department.

Whether it was covering a three-alarm fire or the visit of a president, Jones developed into an artist who composed his stories with a camera, and whenever a circus visited Boston he and his 4 x 5″ Graflex Speed Graphic were often found at the railroad yards as wagons and animals were unloaded, or in an upper story window chronicling circus parades. After scrambling back to the newsroom his glass negatives were quickly developed and one or two of the images were printed in that day's *Evening Traveler* or the next morning's *Boston Herald.*

Of the almost 40,000 negatives in the Leslie Jones Collection, several hundred of them relate to circus and outdoor entertainment. Because the assignments allowed him to take many more pictures than were published in the newspapers, most of these photographs have never appeared in print. As you read about them, I urge you to examine the images carefully as you will see amazing detail, especially in the lot scene on page 10 and the Tremont Street parade on page 12.

Bandwagon would like to thank the family of Leslie Jones, along with the staff of the Boston Public Library Print Department for allowing us a glimpse into the body of work created during his long career as a "news cameraman." Bw

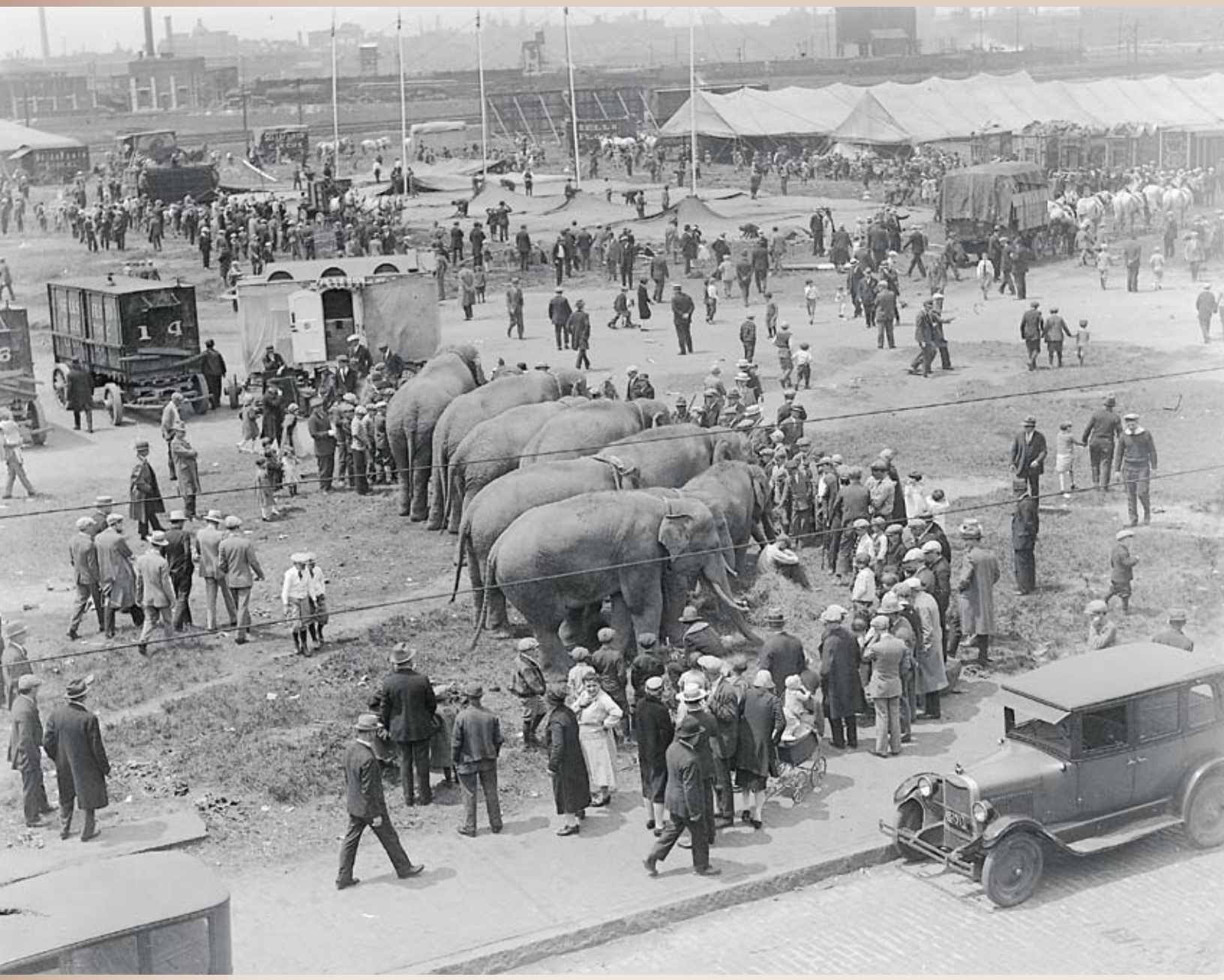
When Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey arrived at the vast Charlestown rail yards on April 30, 1939, Leslie Jones was there with his camera. This photo is historically significant as it shows how elephants were regularly used to unload the Ringling-Barnum train after Walter McClain took over as elephant superintendent that season. The wagon seen here foreshadows the rapidly evolving mechanized circus envisioned by John Ringling North. This baggage wagon – number 20 – had wooden-spoked wheels when the 1938 tour ended, replaced by dual pneumatic tires only a few months later while the circus was in the Sarasota winter quarters.

The Sells-Floto Circus frequently toured New England where Boston Brahmin could rub shoulders with Native Americans. The Indians were featured for many seasons on the show. This photograph was taken Sunday, May 31, 1931 as the train was being unloaded for performances in South Boston.

On Sunday, May 31, 1931 Sells-Floto arrived in Boston for what would be its final appearance ever in that city. Even though no performances were scheduled that Sunday, those involved with setting up the show were as driven as if they were only in town for a single day. Leslie Jones captured a moment in time as this nine-man sledge gang pounded yet another stake into the ground in the Roxbury section of South Boston.

Boston was a circus battleground when Leslie Jones took this photograph in late May of 1928. Sells-Floto was still operated by Jerry Mugivan and Bert Bowers' American Circus Corporation. It had been routed into South Boston for a week-long engagement that included the Decoration Day holiday. Less than two weeks later, on June 11, Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey also visited Boston setting up at Sullivan Square, on the other side of town. Although both Sells-Floto and Hagenbeck-Wallace would continue building canvas cities in Boston for several more years, 1928 was the last season The Greatest Show on Earth would bring its big top to town, moving into the new Boston Garden the following spring.

Left, Movie cowboy Tom Mix was the feature attraction with the Sells-Floto Circus when Leslie Jones took this photo on the back lot in South Boston, May 27, 1929. During that final pre-Depression season, Mix was already a household name and was said to be earning $20,000 a week from his circus appearances. Whether that was true or merely press agent puffery, Mix was a newsworthy subject, and Jones took many photographs of him during his circus appearances in Boston between 1929 and 1931.



This amazing photograph from Sunday May 27, 1928 shows organized chaos unfolding as Sells-Floto set up, the circus activities complicated by a large South Boston crowd that no doubt came out to watch the free show after attending church services. Although the focal point is the elephants in the foreground, the action is beyond them where canvasmen are lacing up the menagerie tent and horses are pulling wagons, all under the watchful eyes of hundreds of Bostonians and one artistic photographer. The detail in this photograph is remarkable, made possible by the 4 x 5″ glass negatives Leslie Jones used to document the day's news. The canvas-covered vehicle at the end of the bull line-up is the show office and ticket wagon, today preserved at Circus World Museum.

This action shot features several cage wagons built for the Sells-Floto Circus by Sullivan & Eagle of Peru, Indiana about a quarter of a century earlier, being pulled by elephants onto the showgrounds. Imagine the anticipation of those on hand who saw the harnessed elephants lumbering by and heard the "knock" of the cage wagon wheels as well as an occasional snarl from a denizen within. More than 85 years ago the excitement depicted here was recognized by the editors of The National Geographic Magazine, *who included this photograph in the October 1931 issue as an illustration for Francis Beverly Kelley's essay, "The Land of Sawdust and Spangles." After Sells-Floto closed in 1932 these cage wagons were shifted to Hagenbeck-Wallace. Some of their carvings are currently in the collection at Circus World Museum.*

Leslie Jones had a perfect vantage point across from Boston Common for one of the last horse-drawn circus parades in the city. From his perch high above the corner of Tremont and Park Streets, Jones captured not only the highlights of the Sells-Floto parade, but also created an historical record of a busy city thoroughfare in the late 1920s. The close observer will see amazing detail in this photograph, from the number of horses used to pull each wagon to the wardrobe and uniforms worn by those in the parade. Quite a few Bostonians stopped to witness the rolling pageant, but others continued their daily rituals without giving much notice.

This photograph from late May of 1922 shows a backyard scene during a matinee performance, where an ensemble of dogs and a snow-white horse similar to Ella Bradna's "Act Beautiful" was queuing up for its entrance into the Sells-Floto big top. The act was trained by Victor Bedini and his wife Madame Adela Bedini who rode dressage horses on the hippodrome track as this presentation unfolded in the center ring and other animal acts appeared in the end rings and on two stages.

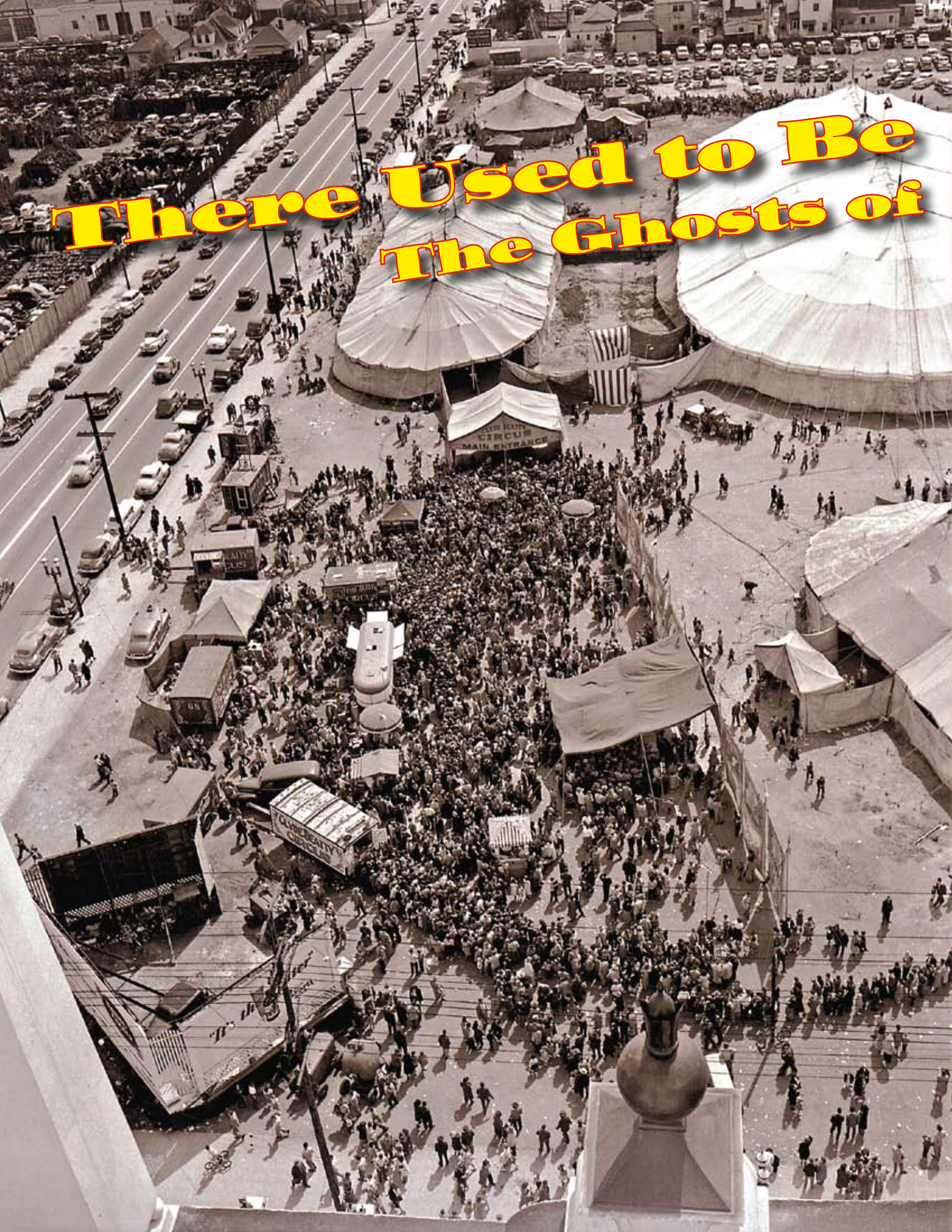
In a scene that played out year-after-year, Leslie Jones captured the Ringling Bros. andBarnum&Baileyelephant herd as it entered the back door at 150 Causeway Street. This building, adjacent to the Boston Garden, was where animals were kept during the engagements in the city. The Garden itself can be seen on the far right of this c.1946 photograph. The elephant ramp continued to be used to move equipment and animals into the Garden until the circus gave its final performance at the building in October 1994.

Above, Boston was on the itinerary for the 101 Ranch Real Wild West show in June 1927, and Leslie Jones was assigned to cover all aspects of the show from parade to performance. This photograph shows a tremendous amount of activity on the South Boston showgrounds as a Conestoga wagon is about to be pulled by a team of six oxen. The close observer will see what appears to be kindling loaded on the wagon, perhaps to be torched during the upcoming Wild West performance.

At right, when The Greatest Show on Earth rolled into Boston Garden for a four-day stand in May 1946, the performance featured the spec "Toyland," with costumes designed by Billy Livingston. Through flash photography, Leslie Jones memorialized this scene from the arena floor as two elephants from the Ringling herd, dressed from head to toe as clowns, make their way around the hippodrome track. Reggie Bogart was perched between their "arms," the paired bulls flanked by Alfred Vidbel and another unidentified elephant handler.

This scene from the 1940s shows some of the most prominent members of the Ringling-Barnum clown alley visiting the pediatric ward at one of Boston's hospitals. Harry Dann, Clayton Chase, Emmett Kelly and Paul Horompo definitely appear to be cheering up a young patient who would not be able to attend the show. In addition to covering breaking news stories, staged events seemed candid when captured by Leslie Jones. More than 50 years after his death he continues to prove the adage that a picture is worth a 1,000 words.

There Used to Be The Ghosts of



a Circus Here: Washington and Hill

by Chris Berry

On the morning of Sunday, March 13, 1955, readers of the *Los Angeles Times* learned of a major new commercial development to be built on a large vacant lot just southwest of downtown. The new $7 million Los Angeles Furniture Mart would be constructed on a city block bounded by Broadway on the east, Hill Street on the west, on the north by Washington Boulevard, and on the south by 21st Street.[1]

For many who had moved to Southern California during the post-war boom years, the announcement was just the latest large real estate project in a city where the population had exploded from 1,600 residents in 1850 to nearly 2,000,000 a century later.[2] For others, such as Charles Cohan, Real Estate Editor at the *Times,* the lot at the corner of Washington and Hill was wistfully acknowledged as the center of entertainment in the first half of the 20th Century. "Chutes Park has a definite place in the early 1900s story of Los Angeles," Cohan wrote in an editorial a week later. "The park faded and the area between Washington Boulevard, Broadway and Hill Street became the location of a Los Angeles ball park. Later that park went elsewhere and for quite a long time in later years that site became known as the circus grounds."[3]

This is the story of one of the most illustrious showgrounds in the United States. Although the boundaries shifted slightly as development encroached on the neighborhood, the name "Washington and Hill" was synonymous with "circus grounds" from the late 1800s until April 10, 1955 when the Clyde Beatty Circus rolled off the lot for the last time. Over a 60-year period, literally millions of spectators were treated to hundreds of circus performances. The lot was so popular that three or four circuses would frequently exhibit there in the same year, at times arriving only days after another show had moved on. Leitzel, Wirth, Codona, Cristiani, Beatty and Griebling – every major circus star from the first half of the 20th century had a temporary home at Washington and Hill.

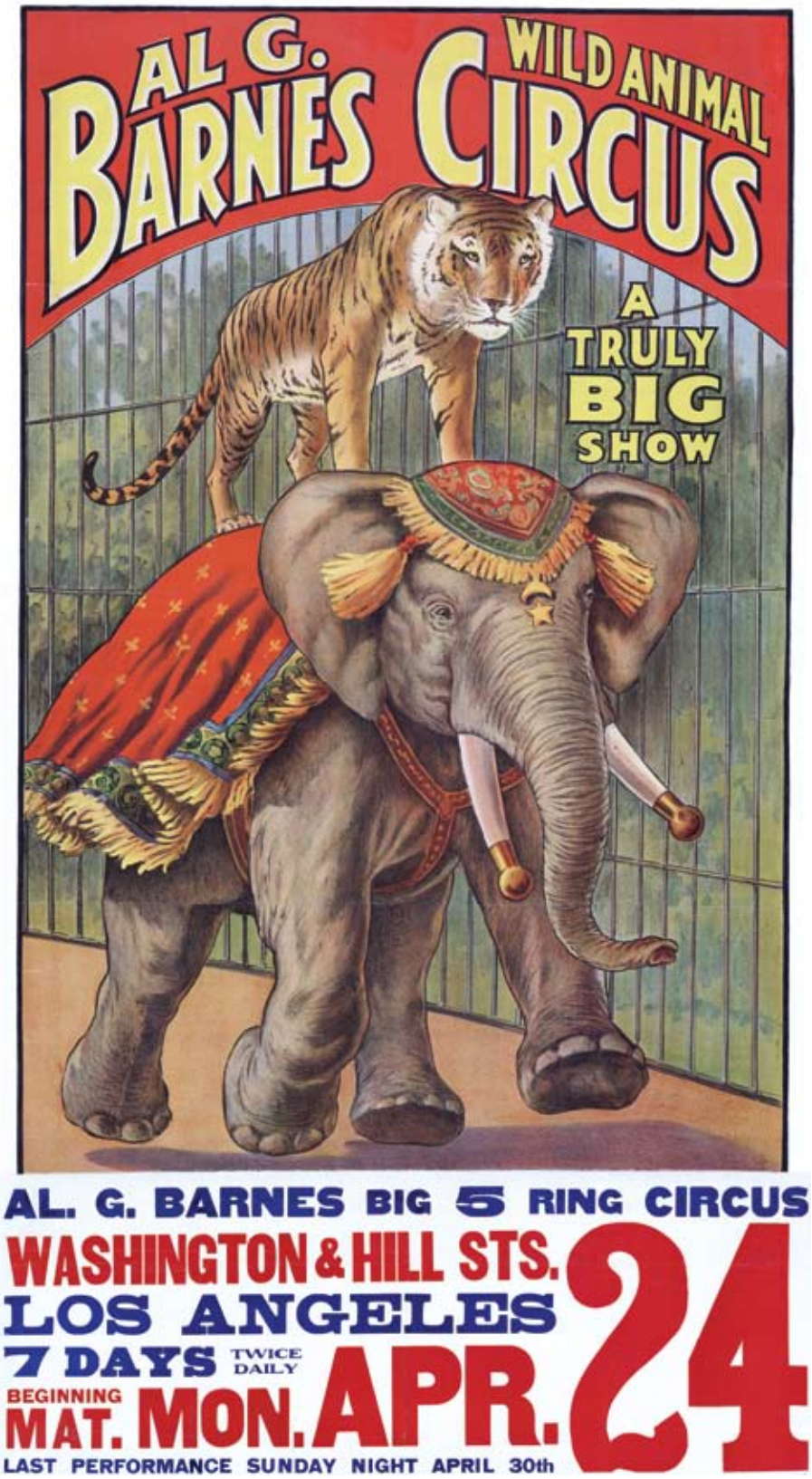
Shortly after the announcement of the real estate deal, *The Billboard* acknowledged the new development project and correctly predicted that the Beatty show would be "the last appearance of a circus on the famed Washington and Hill lot."[4] Although Clyde Beatty had used the showgrounds throughout the early 1950s, the vacant lot had been operating on borrowed time since the winter of 1949 when a judge approved the sale of the property for $500,000 as part of the settlement of David H. McCartney's estate. McCartney was one of the pioneer land developers in Los Angeles, and prior to his death in November of 1948 he had leased the lot to many circuses.[5]

When the news first broke of the court-approved sale in 1949, *The Billboard* reflected on the importance of the lot to circus history. Although Beatty would return for another six years, the trade paper estimated that over the decades more than 2,000,000 tickets had been sold for hundreds of performances presented by dozens of shows, and more than $75,000 had been paid in rental fees to those who owned the property.[6]

Over the years the Los Angeles circus grounds was known by various names. "Washington Gardens," "Washington and Main", "Washington and Grand", "Chutes Park" and "Prager Park" all appear on early billing, but for decades showfolks and fans alike referred to it simply as "Washington and Hill," even as the lot shifted from the north side of Washington Boulevard, across the street to the south.

The corner was also home to one of the city's first motion picture studios which later was replaced by Chutes Park. When the amusement park was abandoned in 1910, the Los Angeles Angels minor league baseball team leased part of the property and built a stadium where games were played well into the 1920s.

Clyde Beatty Circus on the lot at Washington and Hill, Los Angeles, 1948
Circus World Museum



With the show winter quarters in both nearby Venice and Baldwin Park, the Al G. Barnes Circus was a perennial favorite in Los Angeles. This classic lithograph from 1933 promotes the wild animals that were always a featured attraction with the circus. Chris Berry Collection

Because the large vacant tract was some distance from the Los Angeles central business district, many of the downtown streets had not originally been extended as far as Washington Boulevard, creating a wide-open space that was ideal for circuses. As the city grew, Hill Street was extended, presenting a challenge for those who laid out the massive Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Combined Shows. Prager Park was essentially cut in half and the acres of canvas required by the show would no longer fit on the smaller parcels.

According to *The Billboard,* the problem was solved by a contracting agent for the circus named Al Butler. It was Butler who, in 1925, suggested that a temporary bridge be built over Hill Street from the menagerie and sideshow to the big top.[7] The wooden viaduct was constructed prior to the first performance each season, and used by Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey through its final appearance at Washington and Hill in September of 1929.

The 1890s

As railroad circuses began traveling the length and breadth of America, showmen saw the west as fertile territory and the boomtown of Los Angeles became a part of the California tour. Sells Bros., Montgomery Queen and Adam Forepaugh all visited Los Angeles during the 1870s and 1880s, a time when vacant lots were numerous and circuses might set up at one location only to move to another when they returned to the growing city.

Although early circuses may have exhibited in the area near Washington and Hill, the first solid evidence of a performance in that vicinity occurred in September 1895 when the Great Wallace Shows followed the New Great Syndicate Shows into Los Angeles. The fact that two big circuses would be competing within a couple of weeks of each other gave Southern Californians a glimpse of the rivalries

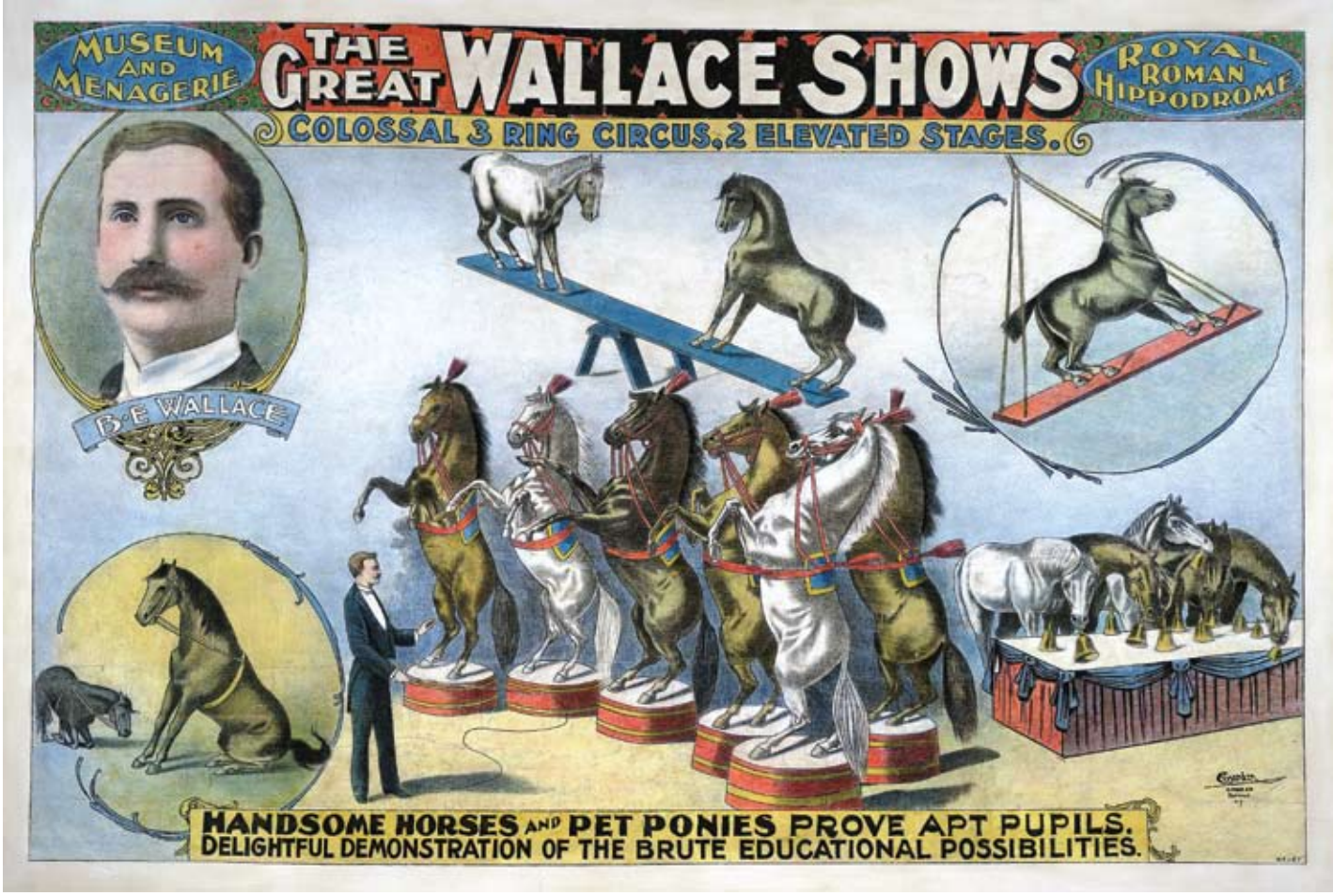
Manpower shortages during World War II required the Cole Bros. Circus to enlist the aid of neighborhood kids on October 3, 1942. Los Angeles Public Library

Above, the Mode O'Day building was constructed in 1927 on the old Prager Park showgrounds site. The venerable structure still stands tall over the Washington and Hill neighborhood just west of downtown Los Angeles. The Reef is one of the many buildings presently sited on the land once simply known as "Washington and Hill."

Chris Berry photograph

Below, the circus audience of the late 19th century had a great appreciation for trained horses and ponies, a featured attraction on the Great Wallace Shows during its visits to Los Angeles in the 1890s.

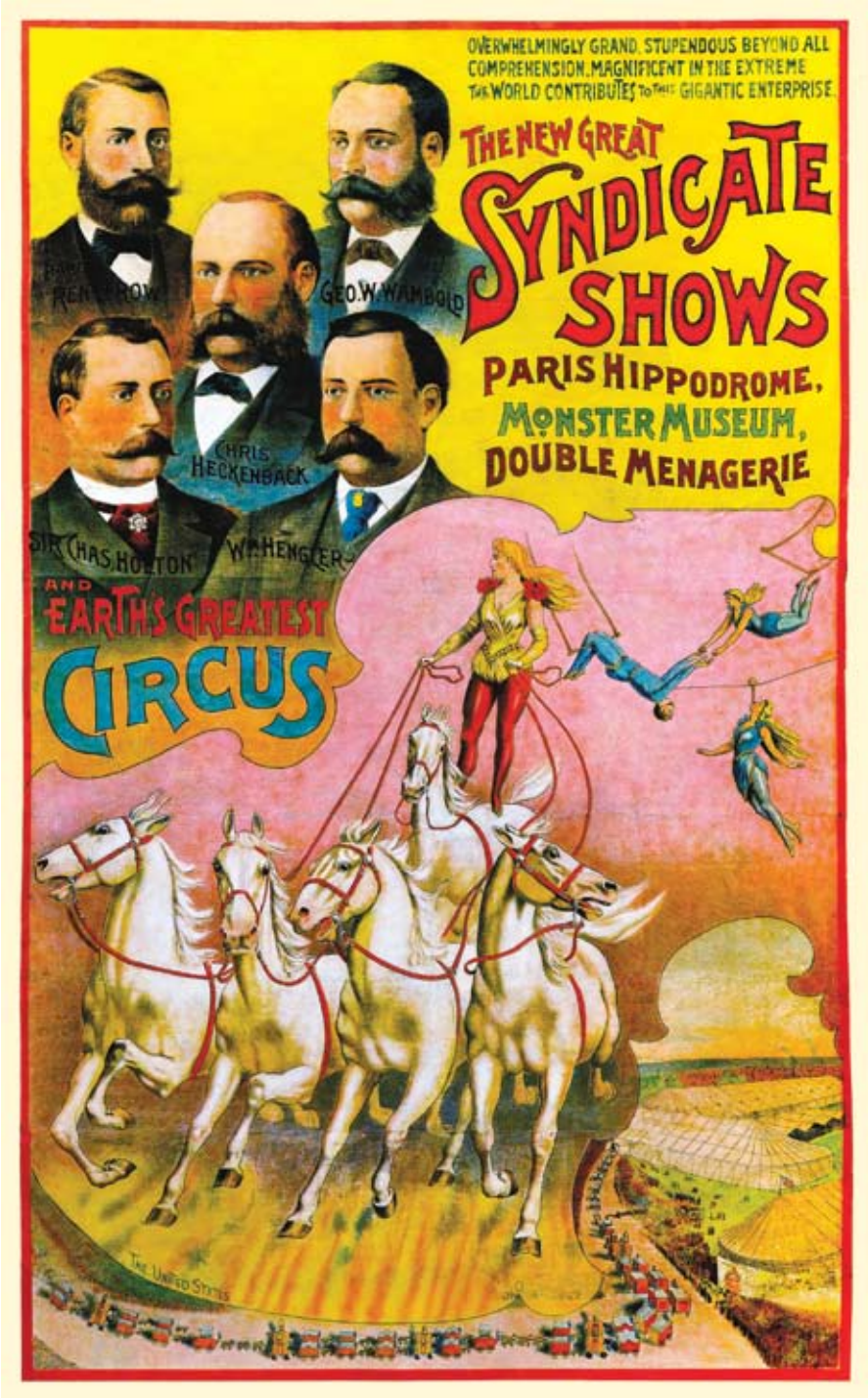
The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art, Tibbals Circus Collection



that had existed for years between East Coast shows operated by Cooper and Bailey, P. T. Barnum and Adam Forepaugh.

Newspaper advertising in the late summer of 1895 urged potential ticket buyers to hold off until the Great Wallace Shows arrived. "The Wise Will Wait," a newspaper advertisement in the *Los Angeles Herald* advised, reminding readers that Wallace was "Positively [the] first Big Show to come across the Rocky Mountains with its entire equipment, and also the first to charge the same prices west as east." The Syndicate Shows appeared to take the high road. Although it was promoted in the same newspaper as "The Mighty Monarch of All Tented Exhibitions," the advertising focused on the many attractions that were on the program rather than making a direct comparison to Wallace. The press promised attractions such as "Rialto, the strongest man on earth," "Victoria, the Most Majestic Royal Bengal Tiger in Captivity" along with two menageries and "The Greatest Bareback Riders the World Has Ever Produced."[8]

The newspapers were not the only place where the two circuses battled, and when billposters began covering up the opposing show's lithographs, the police got involved. Patrick Murphy, a billposter with the Syndicate Shows, was charged with malicious mischief after he was accused of pasting his posters over those of Great Wallace. A trial was held in Los Angeles Township Court on September 4, 1895 and ended with a deadlocked jury.[9]



This striking three-sheet lithograph was produced by Russell, Morgan & Co. for The New Great Syndicate Shows, one of the early railroad circuses to exhibit at Washington and Hill.

The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art, Tibbals Circus Collection

The first to arrive was the New Great Syndicate Shows, and the review in the *Herald* was effusive. "Never in the history of Los Angeles has there been such a success in a show as that of the New Great Syndicate Shows and Paris Hippodrome yesterday. To say that the tents were packed would be expressing the fact in a term too mild. Such a tremendous crowd has never been seen at any place of amusement in this city before."[10]

That sentiment was not shared by all, however, as shortly after the Syndicate Shows left town and only days before Great Wallace arrived, the Los Angeles City Council changed its policy regarding circus licenses, doubling the fee from $500 to $1,000. The city fathers made their decision based on the belief that circuses take thousands of dollars away from the local economy when it leaves town, "and the Syndicate Shows had been of such character to be

taxed out of existence."[11]

After Wallace first threatened to cancel its performances, the Council amended the new ordinance to take effect at midnight on Friday, September 20, five days before the show was scheduled to arrive. The only employee of the circus who was in Los Angeles when the law was changed was John Harrison, a press agent in advance of the show. City officials told Harrison he had to come up with $500 in gold by the time the license office closed at 5:00 p.m. that day. The advance agent rushed to Western Union where he wired the show in San Francisco, explaining the circumstances. After what can only be described as a comedy of errors, Western Union gave the advance man $500 in gold coins and he dashed to City Hall, arriving at the permit office with only nine minutes to spare.[12] The circus was licensed and the trains arrived at the Santa Fe Depot early on the morning of September 25 for its first performances in Los Angeles.

The matinee received an enthusiastic review in the *Times*. "An excellent management provided that the performances in the rings at the extreme ends of the tent were duplicated, thus affording the vast audience admirable facilities for seeing what was being done. Probably the most wonderful feature was the flying trapeze acts of the Fisher brothers, who did an awe-inspiring double flying somersault in midair." The review continued with an observation from outside the big top, "One of the performances that could be seen outside the canvas was the expertness of the lightning ticket seller, Bernard Wallace, nephew of the proprietor of the show, which was so diverting as to make some people almost forget to go further than the ticket wagon."[13]

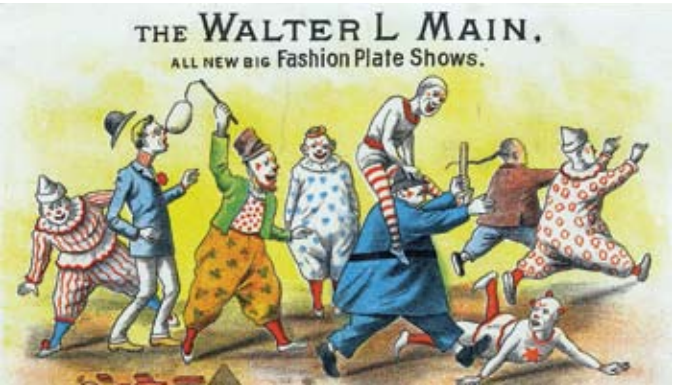
The Great Wallace Shows returned to Los Angeles in the spring of 1896 exhibiting on state-owned land near where the current Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum now sits. The decision to move to a new lot outside of the city's jurisdiction was in part due to the increased license fee enacted prior to the show's arrival in 1895.

In 1896, Adam Forepaugh and Sells Bros. Circus made its first trip to California, and with the licensing fee now resolved, the circus lot was secured near the corner of Washington and Hill. Under the new arrangement by the city, a show playing a two-day stand would now pay $350 for the first day, and $150 for the second.

Adam Forepaugh first visited Los Angeles in 1878 and Sells Bros. made its inaugural trip to the West Coast in 1886. A decade later the combined Forepaugh-Sells, now co-owned by the three Sells brothers and James A. Bailey, retraced some of those earlier routes. While both titles were known to Southern California from the earlier tours, the *Herald* said this new show was bigger, better, and unlike anything ever seen in the city. "The Adam Forepaugh and Sells Bros.' Consolidated Shows is the most complete aggregation of its kind that ever visited Los Angeles or this section of the country. The large tent was crowded both afternoon and evening and a performance was given that would be difficult to excel." The reviewer also complimented the large lot, reporting that "…it affords room for all the purposes of the circus."[14]

Another railroad show to make its first appearance on the West Coast in 1897 was the Walter L. Main Grandest and Best Shows which arrived for a two-day stand on the Washington Street showgrounds in late September, promoting the fact that "shell workers, short change artists, confidence men, etc., are rigidly barred from its precincts."[15] In its review of the show, the *Times* was lukewarm, yet it embraced some of the florid language normally associated with a circus press agent. "Although not quite the 'greatest show on earth,' this particular circus contains many good features," the review began.

> "Anticipation is distinctly better than realization as far as the sideshows and menagerie are concerned, but there are some excellent acts in the circus itself. The trump card of the menagerie of course is the bovalapus [water buffalo]. He is tied in a large enclosure, evidently more for his own safety than that of the crowd, as his man-eating propensities have



Walter L. Main was 35 years old when he first brought his "Fashion Plate Shows" to Los Angeles in 1897. This trade card was produced by Erie Litho. Co. to promote the 15-car railroad circus.

The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art, Tibbals Circus Collection

calmed down since he emigrated from the Upper Nile. This particular relic of a nearly extinct species is a corpulent yellow animal with irregular features and a mild cud-chewing expression."[16]

The Great Wallace Circus was back at Washington and Hill in 1898, and when Walter L. Main returned to Washington Gardens in 1899 it too was treated to positive reviews.

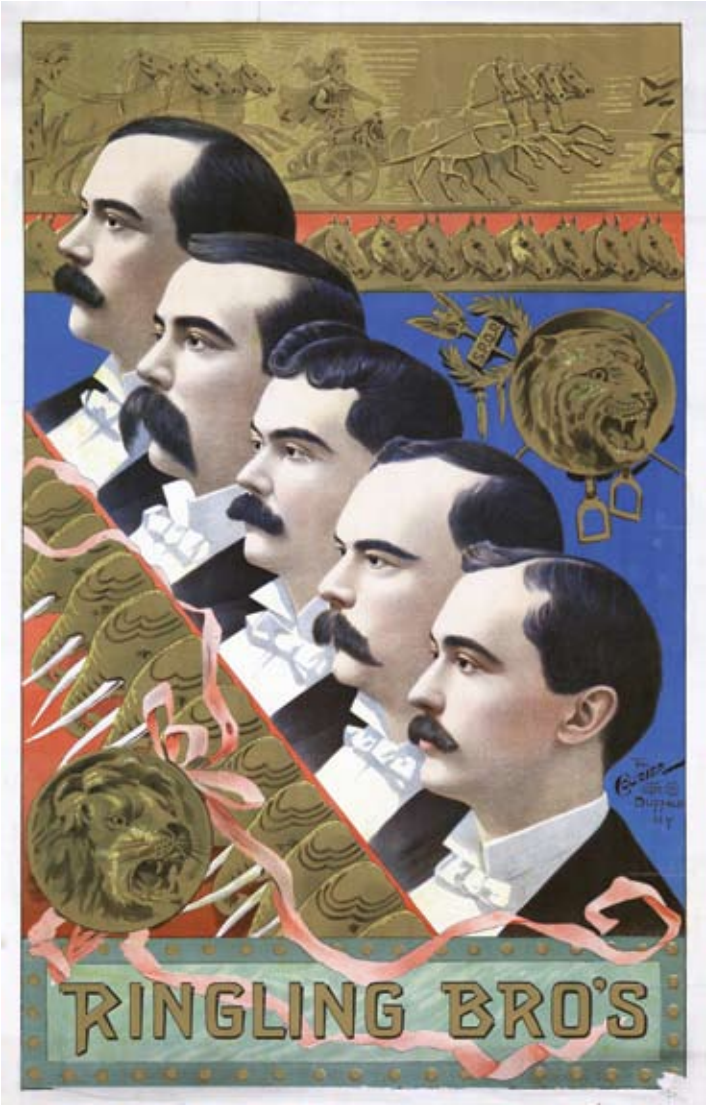
"The spread of canvas is not so large as that of some other circuses which have exhibited here in the past, but in variety and quality of exhibitions the Main show is perhaps as interesting as any that has ever come to Los Angeles. There is nothing seedy-looking about either the people or the animals, vehicles, paraphernalia, etc., composing the aggregation which is advertised as the 'fashion-plate show of the world.'"[17]

Although Walter L. Main never again returned to Los Angeles, other circuses were now eyeing Southern California, with its mild weather and expanding railroad infrastructure, as an ideal destination late in the season when temperatures began to cool elsewhere. As a result, it came as no surprise when the Ringling brothers were planning their first coast-to-coast tour and they set their sights on California. Prior to the turn of the century, the Ringling route was primarily confined to the Midwest and South. But that was about to change.

The 1900s

In 1900, the Ringling Bros. World's Greatest Shows claimed to be the first circus to travel from the Atlantic to the Pacific in a single season. The 8,181-mile tour took the show north into Canada and as far south as the Mexican border, exhibiting in 28 states, two U.S. territories and British Columbia. According to the 1900 Route Book, during its five weeks in California the show averaged nearly three sell-out performances each week, with thousands turned away in both San Francisco and Los Angeles.[18]

During the performances at the Washington Gardens lot, the newspapers related stories of clever schemes concocted by those who did not want to be left out. According to the *Times,* "as the crowd was smothering the ticket booth, there was a sudden cry of 'fight! fight!' The crowd broke for the superior attraction, and two bright young men took advantage of the little stampede to buy their tickets. Of course there was no fight."[19]



The five Ringling brothers took pride in the fact that their circus traveled from sea to shining sea in 1900. Their gigantic show set up that year on the Washington Gardens showgrounds across the street from Prager Park, on the south side of Washington Boulevard. This poster printed by the Courier Litho. Co. of Buffalo, New York was used during the 1900 season. Circus World Museum

The Ringling Bros. performance in 1900 featured the spec, "The Last Days of the Century," along with acts such as the Riding Rooneys and the antics of Spader Johnson, Jules Turnour and George Hartzell, "The Children's Favorite Clown." Others included Samuel Lockhart with the Ringling elephants, Cecil Lowande, and the Flying Fishers, all under the watchful eye of Equestrian Director Al. Ringling.

Ringling Bros. returned to Los Angeles in 1904, but the performances that season were presented a short distance

This photograph from September 25, 1905 captured police trying to control the huge crowd outside of the Owl Drug Store as hundreds clamored for tickets to the Los Angeles debut of Barnum & Bailey's Greatest Show on Earth.

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away, at Agricultural Park, the same lot that Great Wallace had played in 1896. The next time the tour brought Ringling Bros. to California was 1907, and the show returned to the earlier showgrounds, now known as Prager Park, a reference to the early Los Angeles developers and merchants Sam and Charles Prager who now owned the property at Washington and Hill.

Prager Park was also the location of Barnum & Bailey's first foray into Los Angeles, arriving for a two-day stand September 25, 1905. Although Barnum & Bailey had spent the 1898-1902 seasons on an odyssey that had routed the show through Europe, it was not until two years after returning to the United States that *The Greatest Show on Earth* made its first-ever trip to California. Six weeks before the show arrived the *Times* predicted a tremendous response. "This will be the first visit of the Barnum & Bailey circus to Los Angeles, but the fame of the show has preceded it, and an unusually successful engagement is anticipated."[20]

Once the news was out, retailers began promoting "circus sales." The Machin Shirt Company ran advertising for garments to wear to the circus,[21] and the Owl Drug Store ran "circus specials." The pharmacy advertised that "by buying here and now you'll save enough to pay for your circus tickets."[22]

Tickets for Barnum & Bailey's first performances in Los Angeles were at such a premium that when the show was sold out and ticket sales were halted a mob began rocking one of the ticket wagons.

> "…the big crowd surged about the wagon until it was almost overturned. Those in the wagon called for help and a score or more circus employ-

ees responded, but they could do nothing. Police whistles sounded by the circus employees brought nearly all the uniformed patrolmen within hearing to the scene, and these, with the detectives, forced their way to the wagon, braced themselves against it, and held off the crowd. Those nearest the wagon found it impossible to get out of the crush, and the police could not use their clubs to drive the people back. Other officers were summoned, and after fifteen minutes of struggling the wagon was taken under one of the small tents."[23]

During the 1905 California legislative session an anti-scalping law was passed, yet despite the threat of arrest, opportunists developed a plan to double their money. "As early as midnight the line began to form in front of the ticket window," the *Times* reported. "Messenger boys would buy $100 worth of tickets and sell them in a short time for $200, returning to the window and buying $200 worth, selling them for $400." Throughout the day, several of the messenger boys were brought into the office of the Chief of Police.[24]

After witnessing the first Barnum & Bailey performance, a reporter wrote of the wonders of the circus in an article that included sub-headlines of " 'Greatest Show on Earth' Not a Misnomer" and "Best of Its Kind that Ever Came to the Coast." The circus was described as "an organization entitled to some more comprehensive designation than simply a show. It is a liberal education – what you might call a university training in nature and animal study, acrobatic feats, hair-raising aerial exploits and 'superb surpassing sublime and sensational surprises'…for a couple of hours under the big five-acre tent at Prager Park."[25]

The article goes on to describe a scene that happened at the Owl Drug Store, which in addition to offering "circus specials" also had the privilege of being the downtown ticket outlet.

"Barnum & Bailey had never been west of Denver before, and the people of Los Angeles expressed their appreciation of the fact by smashing in the plate-glass window of the Owl Drug Store, where tickets were put on sale, in their enthusiasm and eagerness to possess themselves of the bits of pasteboard that admitted to the 'Greatest Show on Earth.' The police had to interfere and the streets ran – not red with blood – but fragrant with perfume and violet water, bottles of which got badly battered in the rush. The main tent seats nearly 15,000 people and there was not a vacant place to be seen."[26]

When the circus left Los Angeles for Santa Ana on the morning of September 27, the *Herald* reported that a record had been set during the two-day stand. "The treasurer's count, as furnished last night after the concluding performance, shows the total attendance for the two days to have been 65,392. The next greatest record for a similar period is held by London, with 61,947 admissions."[27] The article continued, "During the stay of the circus another record was established. Not a robbery was reported in any way traceable to the show or its people nor an accident. The most perfect order prevailed and the police force and the show's detectives deserve the credit for this."[28]

Norris & Rowe was the first circus to visit Los Angeles in 1906, booked in late March for a four-day stand at Prager Park that included a street parade every day. On the first day there was as much excitement outside the tent as there was under the canvas when "…a baboon escaped from the animal tent Monday and with great difficulty he was recaptured. When his keeper attended to catch him he climbed on top of the main tent. It took several employees to run him down but he managed to break the chain from his neck, and by striking at the men caused several injuries."[29]

The same reporter gave some advice to those who were considering taking a date to see Norris & Rowe. "Boys, if you take your best girl to the circus be sure and have peanut and red lemonade money. If the fellow doesn't want the goods on sale, the salesman insists the girl desires them. He stands in front of you and sings, 'A man is pretty cheap who won't buy his best girl what she wants.' "[30]

As a result of a non-compete agreement signed by the Ringling Bros. and James A. Bailey prior to his death in the spring of 1906, Barnum & Bailey was given exclusive rights to show in Canada "and all of the southern states and territory lying east of the Mississippi River and south of the Ohio River, also all of the Eastern and New England States lying east of the Eastern Ohio State line except Pennsylvania." The Ringlings would play Pennsylvania, the Midwest and the South, and the jointly-owned Forepaugh-Sells Circus would be routed to the West.[31]

Despite this plan, circumstances changed with the death of James A. Bailey on April 11, 1906. By the time Forepaugh-Sells began its California tour on August 27, the Ringlings had purchased his widow's share of that circus for $100,000.[32] Forepaugh-Sells was scheduled to open at Prager Park on Sunday September 23, but because of a

One of the featured attractions when Sells-Floto made its Los Angeles debut in 1907 was Marie Roquet, a Colorado-born equestrienne known as "The Girl in Red," billed here as "Mamselle Rouge."

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long-standing ordinance prohibiting circuses on Sunday, the city's License Clerk refused to issue a permit. That Saturday night, with just hours until show time, an emergency meeting of the Los Angeles City Council was called. The councilmen voted five to one to rescind the law and allow the circus to perform on Sunday, although the parade would not be staged until Monday morning.[33]

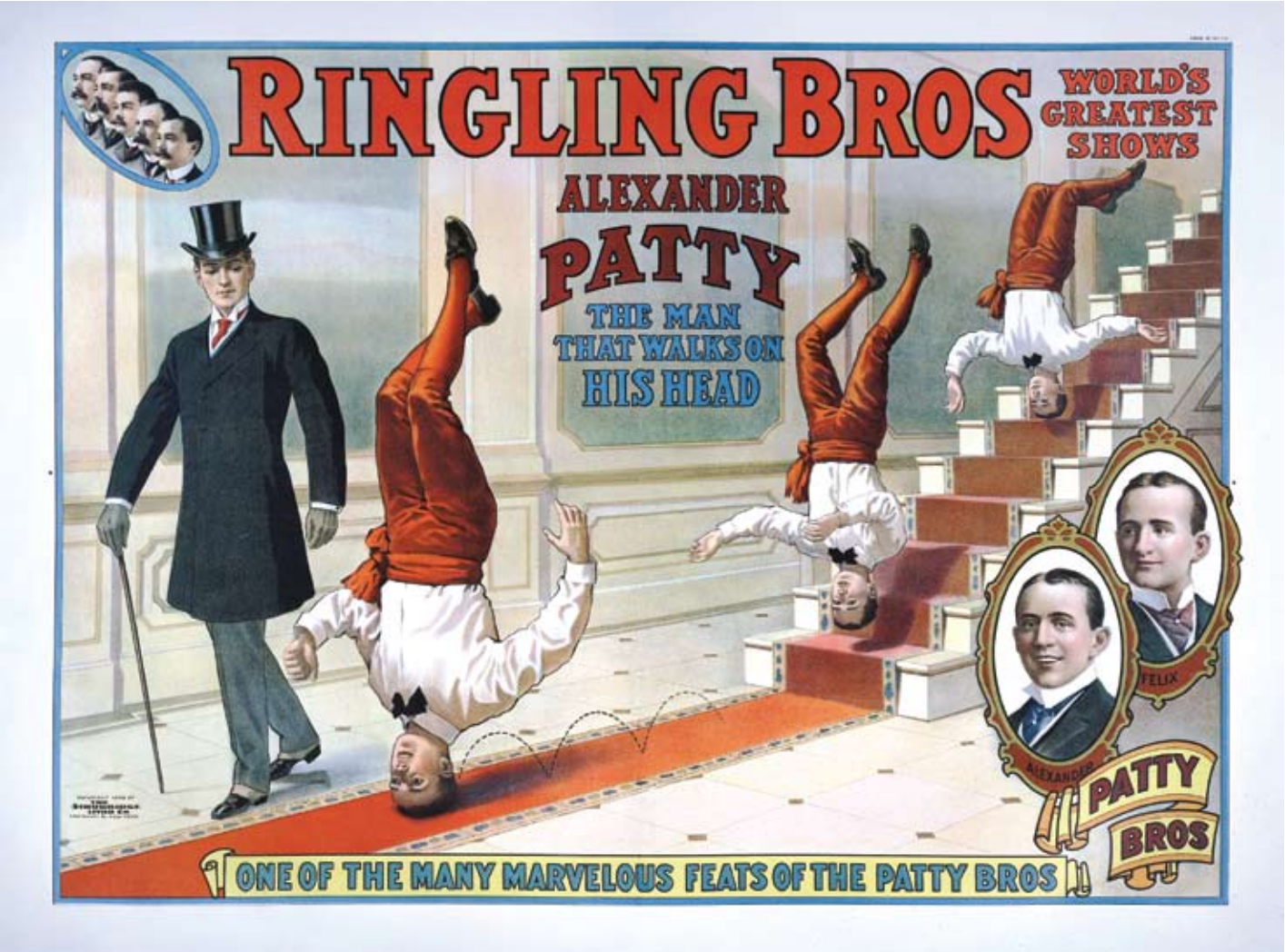
By the spring of 1907, Prager Park was quickly becoming known throughout the circus world as the prime location for circuses to set up when in Los Angeles. The first show on the lot that year was Sells-Floto, which was making its Los Angeles debut after wintering in nearby Venice, opening its season in early April.

The Sells-Floto Circus of 1907 was dwarfed by the Ringling Bros. World's Greatest Shows that arrived on the Washington and Hill lot just five months later. The enormous circus that rolled onto the lot on September 22, 1907 was now part of a portfolio that included the recently acquired Barnum & Bailey *Greatest Show on Earth* and Forepaugh-Sells, the nation's third largest circus. The Ringling brothers now dominated the circus world, and the show that was presented that season included a number of new European acts such as the Alvarez family of Spain, the Legurds from France, and the Borsenis from Italy. One of the acts that astounded the Los Angeles audiences in 1907 was the Patty brothers, who walked up a flight of stairs and jumped rope on their heads!

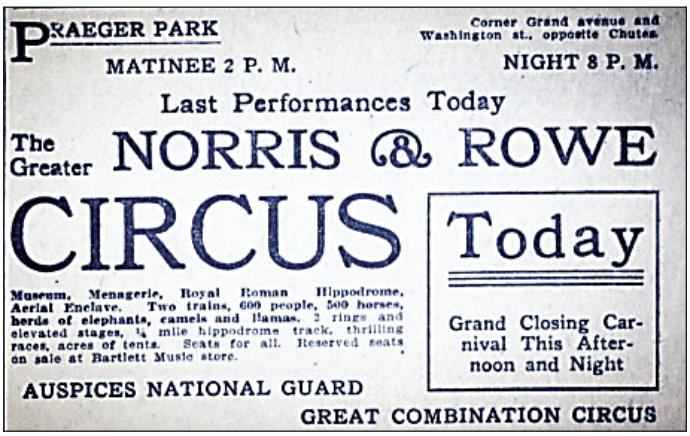
Los Angeles was treated to two additional circuses very late in the 1907 season. Norris & Rowe returned to Prager Park on November 11 after a two-year hiatus, and just one week later Gentry Bros. made its first trip to Los Angeles, setting up not far away, at the corner of 11th and Flower Streets.

After wintering again in nearby Venice, Sells-Floto partnered with the Los Angeles Shrine Club in April 1908 to produce what was one of the first Shrine circuses in America. The innovative production was held under canvas at the Washington and Hill showgrounds. "The Shriners practically have control of the Sells-Floto Show," according to the *Times.* "After weeks of training…the Nobles have battered themselves into shape to give a first class show." About 20 Shriners joined Spader Johnson and the Sells-Floto clown alley in the week-long program which raised $10,000 for the Children's Hospital.[34]

Five months after Sells-Floto and the Shriners finished their fundraiser, the Barnum & Bailey *Greatest Show on Earth* returned to Prager Park for its second visit to Southern California, the first under Ringling ownership. On September 22, 1908, opening day of the engagement, strong damaging winds swept through the Los Angeles basin. As reported by the *Times,*



The highly unusual act presented by Alexander Patty and his brother Felix was a feature of the Ringling Bros. Circus in the early 20th century. The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art, Tibbals Circus Collection



The Norris & Rowe Circus of 1909 was presented as a benefit for the California National Guard with profits used to help construct a new armory. The building, located in Exposition Park, is now part of a museum known as the California Science Center. Chris Berry Collection

> "When the big dust storm began to take up skirts and debris in its sudden whirl yesterday afternoon, it hit the main tent at Washington and Grand with a series of furious blows, but the canvas budged not – and the early-comers within scarcely knew the reason. Because the 'big top' was safety-pegged against just such a windstorm, with a series of guys and pulleys that are of absolutely no use except in such an emergency…that's the military precision of a great circus."[35]

The excitement of the windstorm was surely exceeded by the program, which featured The Imperial Viennese Troupe on the flying trapeze, and "autos that pass in the air," described by the *Times* as "…a thrill act where a young woman slides down a steep incline and turns a somersault in the air while another automobile leaps a gap under it,

Norris & Rowe featured a parade hitch of a single dromedary camel during its final visit to the Washington and Hill lot in the spring of 1909.

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both landing on a platform and racing down an incline."[36]

When Norris & Rowe was booked onto the Prager Park lot in March of 1909, it was sponsored by the National Guard, which was raising money for its armory. The guardsmen worked side by side with the regular circus lithographers putting up posters on billboards, walls and in store windows.[37]

While the benefit performance was a success, there was a bit of a panic on opening night during the camel race when one of the jockeys was thrown from his mount, frightening the others on the hippodrome track. Attendants "rushed into the arena and rescued the prostrate man, while others devoted themselves to averting what might have been a serious panic."[38]

Less than a month after Norris & Rowe wagons rolled off the lot, Sells-Floto's rolled on, for a two-day stand. The stay was memorable for those with the show, but for all of the wrong reasons. When the circus left town, management was "thoroughly disgusted with the treatment accorded them during their stay in Los Angeles."[39] It all started during the parade on the morning of April 21 when the superintendent of the circus, George Ferguson, along with his

assistant, were fined $25 each, charged with "animal cruelty" for allowing three horses in the parade to pull wagons despite the appearance of sores on their necks and shoulders.[40]

The next day Los Angeles police raided the Sells-Floto pie car, where they arrested a bartender for illegally serving liquor and confiscated a roulette wheel, several thousand poker chips and dozens of packs of cards. The detectives also seized "a quantity of Champagne, whisky, wines and beer valued at $2,000."[41] The bartender who, was arrested for violating the local liquor ordinance, paid a $100 fine, after which F. J. Worrell, assistant manager for Sells-Floto, unsuccessfully argued to get the liquor returned. According to the *Herald,* the amount of liquor and paraphernalia seized filled four large automobiles.[42]

Any animosity from the community appeared to have vanished by the time Ringling Bros. arrived at Washington and Hill in late September, and the *Times* gushed with enthusiasm about the parade and the show.

> "To the blare of trumpets, booming of many bands, and howling of former denizens of the forest wilds, hundreds of school children, old children and visitors from the country assembled along the city streets and watched the pageant. One of the novel features of the parade was a chariot drawn by sixteen mush-footed camels four abreast. The laughing hyenas refused to laugh and appeared downcast. The massive hippopotamus was concealed from vision…The raucous roar of the fire-spitting and steam-hissing calliope ended the procession and many rushed over to other streets to see it all over again.
>
> "In one ring there were wire walkers, trapeze artists whirling impossible feats in another, young women doing a balancing act in the third ring. Nowadays they all come on like a chorus in the same colors.
>
> "Marvelous! Marvelous! Anybody can court death on a trapeze or slide down a high wire on one's ear; but the young lady who can stand on her head on another young lady's coiffure without losing her blonde switch is a real artist."[43]

Despite the success under the big top, the show did attract the attention of the Los Angeles police when one of the principal riders, Albert Hodgini, and a groom named George Munkeboa, were jailed on charges of cruelty to animals related to the bit used by the horses during a bareback act. In addition, Henry Ringling was arrested because one of the wagons was left on the street without a light on it. Mr. Ringling was fined $1.00.[44]

The 1910s

On April 10, 1910, a small item in the *Herald* mentioned that Barnum & Bailey would be returning that year. The notice came five months before *The Greatest Show on Earth* was scheduled to arrive, but only 17 days before Sells-Floto was due to set up at Washington and Hill. In response, the smaller show began running newspaper ads urging patrons not to wait. "Thus the People Not the Circus Benefit While the Cruel Circus War Lasts" the advertisements blared. The ad went on to say, "Don't Forget, It's a Cruel Circus War Relentlessly Waged by a Circus Trust So Sells-Floto Declares Bargain Day," with a general admission of only 25-cents.[45]

When Barnum & Bailey did arrive on September 21, the residents of Los Angeles showed their enthusiasm with thousands turning out for the parade, and hundreds standing in line "for nearly two hours crowding three abreast along the curb for nearly a block, in order to buy tickets. Five hundred tickets were sold by 8:30, and by 11 o'clock there were about 1500 in line." 20,000 people reportedly saw the evening performance with another 15,000 turned away, despite the fact that the circus lot was moved about a mile west, to the corner of Washington and Pacific, shortly before the show arrived.[46] Although these crowd numbers appear to be exaggerated, patronage was indeed staggering.

Among the acts that dazzled the audience that day were Jupiter, the balloon-riding horse, Desperado, the high-dive daredevil, and Charles the First, described as "a wonderfully trained ape [who] rides horses, turns somersaults and does other things quite amazing."[47]

The 1910 season was also distinguished by the debut of the Al. G. Barnes Wild Animal Show for a week long stand beginning November 22. It was the first of many times Barnes would bring his circus to Washington and Hill.

Lucia Zora, the female elephant trainer, was the featured attraction when Sells-Floto returned to Prager Park for two days in April of 1911. The act featured two 16-month old baby elephants, Kas and Mo, who "walk on bottles, stand on their heads, salute, cake walk and two-step." They were also trained to pull a cart in tandem, just as horses would."[48]

Sells-Floto was repeating the same pattern of several previous seasons, starting the tour in California before turning east. The spectacle and wonder of the circus brought to the city was described by the *Times* which reported that

DATE	TOWN	STATE	R. R.	MILES
Aug. 28	Walla Walla	Wash.	Northern Pacific Ry.	136
Aug. 29	Baker City	Oregon	O.W.R.R.& Nav.Co.	173
Aug. 30	Boise	Idaho	O.W.R.R.&O.S.L.R.R.	149
Aug. 31	Pocatello	"	O. S. L. R. R.	265
Sept. 1	Ogden	Utah	"	134
Sept. 2	Salt Lake City	"	"	34
	SUNDAY			
Sept. 4	Reno	Nevada	OSLRR & S P CO.	576
Sept. 5	Auburn	Calif.	Southern Pacific Co.	118
Sept. 6	Sacramento	"	"	36
Sept. 7	Oakland	"	"	83
Sept. 8	San Francisco	"	"	63
Sept. 9	"	"		
Sept. 10	"	"		
Sept. 11	"	"		
Sept. 12	San Jose	"	Southern Pacific Co.	51
Sept. 13	Stockton	"	"	81
Sept. 14	Fresno	"	"	123
Sept. 15	Visalia	"	"	41
Sept. 16	Bakersfield	"	"	80
	SUNDAY			
Sept. 18	Los Angeles	Calif.	Southern Pacific Co.	170
Sept. 19	"	"		
Sept. 20	"	"		
Sept. 21	San Diego	"	Santa Fe Route	126
Sept. 22	Santa Ana	"	"	90
Sept. 23	San Bernardino	"	"	50

By the time this route card was issued in the late summer of 1911, the familiar image of the five Ringling brothers had been removed from printed material created for the circus. Shortly after Otto Ringling died on March 31 of that year, the surviving brothers eliminated the portraits in his honor.

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10,000 were on hand for the Sunday morning set-up, described as "a free show near Washington and Hill."[49]

Whether it was the size of the circus, or a more favorable lease agreement, in 1911 Ringling Bros. elected to exhibit on the same lot at Washington and Pacific that Barnum & Bailey had used the year before. It was not until November when another show would set up at Prager Park, and this time it was not a circus.

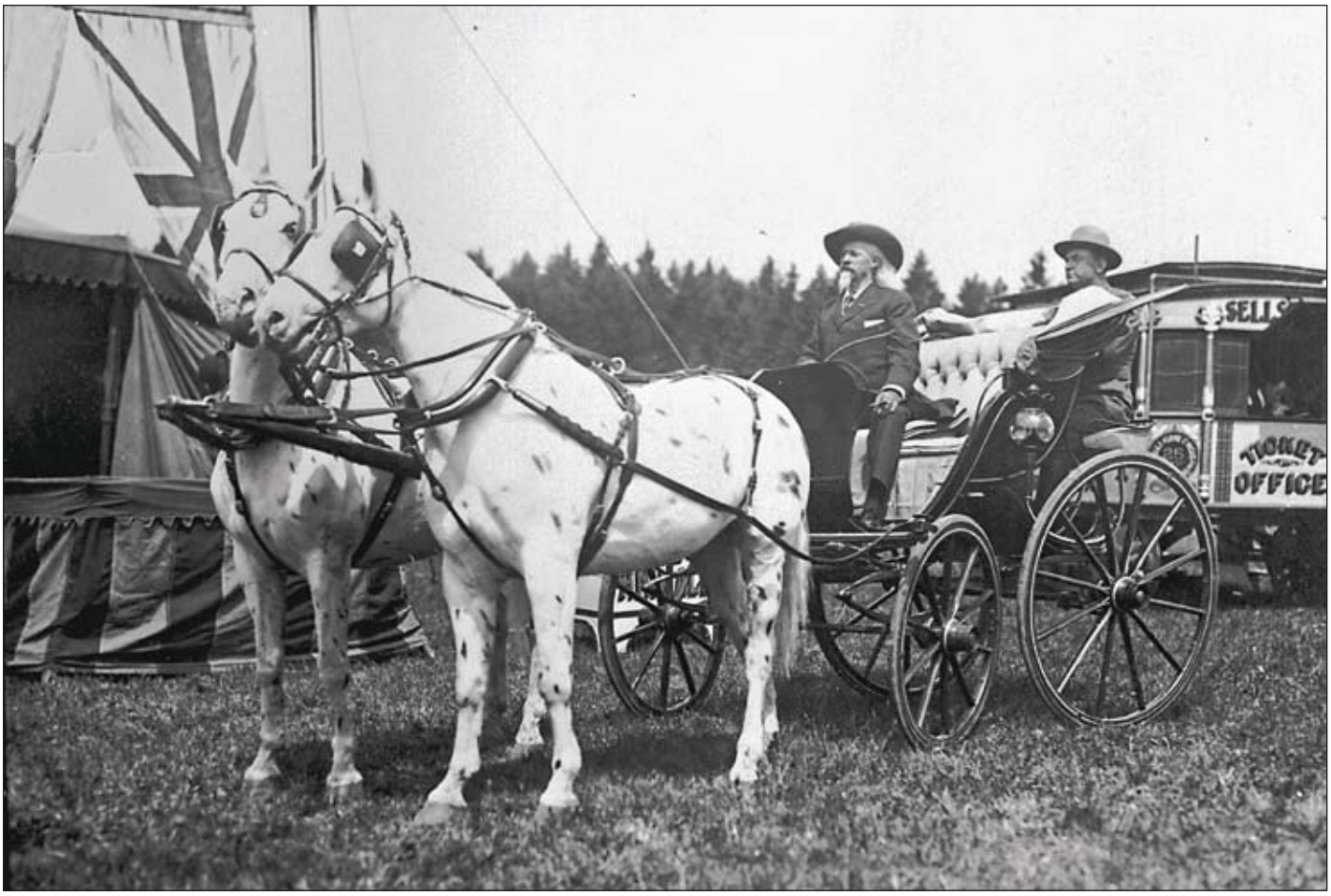
Miller Bros. & Arlington 101 Ranch Real Wild West made its first Los Angeles appearance at Washington and Hill for three days beginning November 11. The audience on 11/11/11 was enthusiastic in its response, crowding the canvas pavilion and "repeatedly cheering and applauding the thrilling performances."[50] Following six shows at Washington and Hill, the 101 Ranch show went into winter quarters in nearby Venice, California.

Another show that was in Venice over the winter of 1911 was Al G. Barnes which again partnered with the Los Angeles Shriners to offer a charity performance at Prager Park from March 4-9, 1912. This time the circus performances coincided with the Shriners national convention which brought some 20,000 members of the order to Los Angeles. No doubt many of them took the idea of a "Shrine Circus" fundraiser back to their local temples.[51]

Only two weeks after Barnes vacated the lot, the 101 Ranch Wild West was back, just four months after its last appearance before going into winter quarters. The new show of 1912 was described as an authentic look at the west, "with a breeziness and 'go' about the performances at Prager Park that the usual Wild West exhibition lacks, and the performance is given by real ranch people who are not only daring and apparently oblivious to danger, but who also have the added and important merit of being exceptionally skillful."[52]

If two shows were not enough, the Sells-Floto Circus made it three when it set up on the same lot two weeks later. Once again, the circus trains unloaded on a Sunday with thousands of spectators on hand. Among those who appeared with Sells-Floto during that stand were Pete and Louise Lindemann, who would later start the Seils-Sterling Circus; long-time equestrian director Rhoda Royal; and Emily Stickney, an equestrienne who "when not 'doing her turn' in the sawdust circle is playing marbles with her toes in the ring. That is the way to develop beautiful feet, she says….bareback riding develops a graceful arch and the marble playing does the rest."[53]

When Barnum & Bailey returned to Los Angeles that fall, it was back at the showgrounds at Washington and Pacific, only a few blocks from Washington and Hill. Another show that skipped the lot that season was Al G. Barnes, which was extending its partnership with the local Shriners, for the first time playing indoors at the original Shrine Auditorium that had opened in 1906. Featured with Al G.



This photo records an appearance of William F. Cody on the Sells-Floto lot during the 1914 season. The hero of the Old West was the featured attraction on the circus when it returned to the Los Angeles showgrounds at the corner of Washington and Hill. Circus World Museum

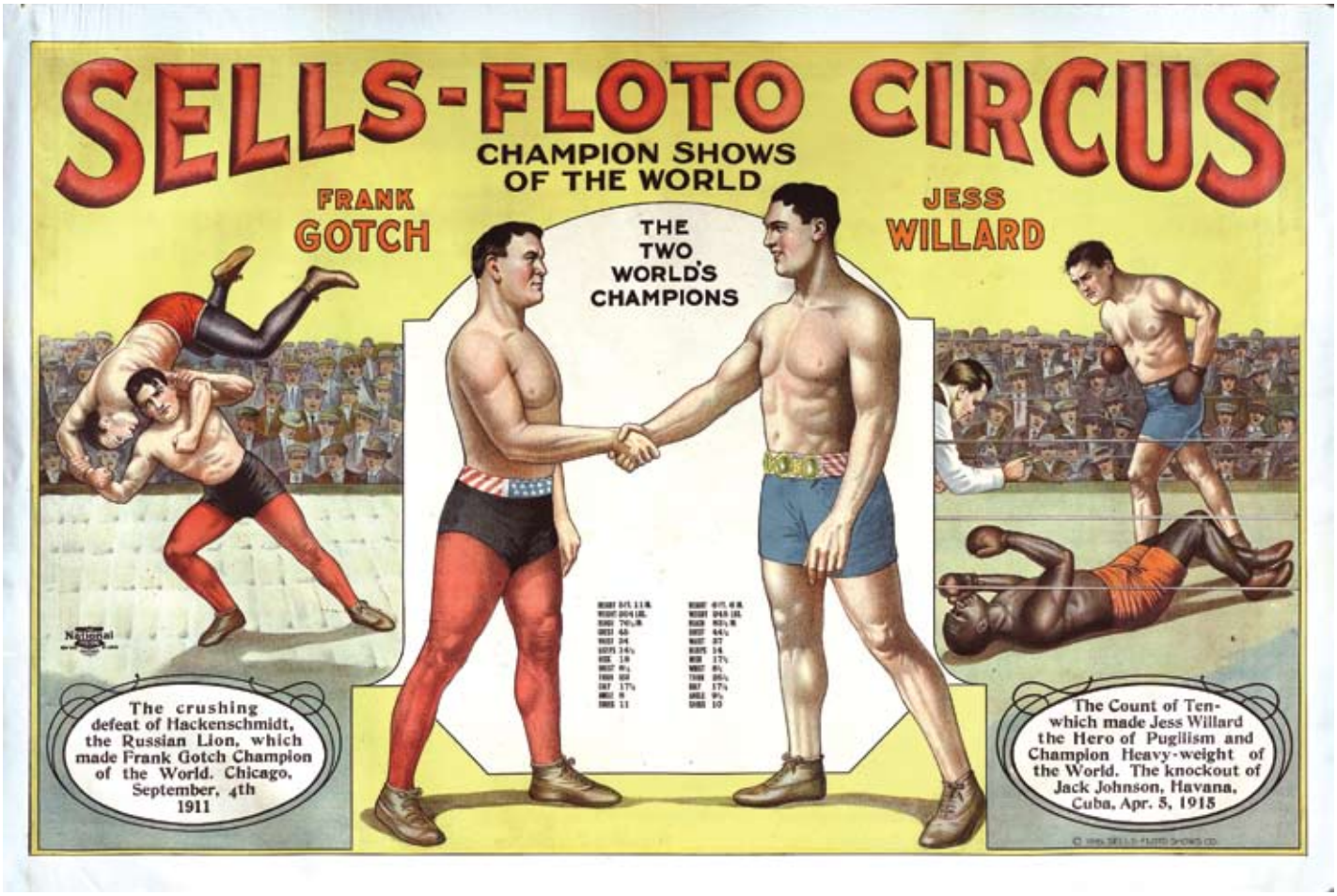
Barnes in 1912 were four female animal trainers. Mabel Stark was in the cage with both tigers and lions; Martha Florine with a large group of lions, leopards and pumas; Mandie Roberts with bears, lions and leopards; and "Miss Harvey" handling elephants.[54]

The arrival of Sells-Floto at Prager Park in 1913 gave the *Times* the opportunity to profile circus owner Harry Tammen, who along with his partner, Fred G. Bonfils, owned the *Denver Post* newspaper. The article spoke of Tammen's rule regarding cursing and romance.

> "Two features make the Sells-Floto circus different from any other in the world. It is swearless and kissless. Tammen, the manager and one of the proprietors, will not swear at an employee or an animal, nor will he permit one of his men to do so. A man-sized cuss-word about that canvas would be worth the job of the most valuable man on the staff. So would a kiss. It is Tammen's idea that character counts in any work and that running a circus is hard work and lots of it. Consequently there is a double-riveted ban on flirting and to make it stick there is a fine of $40 per kiss on any man or woman who forgets."[55]

The 1913 season brought the Ringling Bros. Circus back to Prager Park, and the Sunday arrival of a big show once again attracted thousands as the wagons rumbled off the train and 1,000 working men breathed life into the canvas city. Over the next three days, those who made the trek to the showgrounds at the corner of Washington and Hill were treated to a performance featuring elephants that played baseball, along with a spectacular pageant that told the story of Joan of Arc and her role leading the French against the English during the Hundred Years' War.

When Sells-Floto returned to Washington and Hill in April of 1914, the featured attraction was Buffalo Bill. Although Cody had previously performed in Los Angeles, this was the first time he had appeared at the Prager Park showgrounds. The circus band was conducted by 23-year old Karl L. King who directed several of his own compositions including "Gypsy Queen" and "Sells Floto Triumphal March." While Lucia Zora thrilled the audience with her



The Sells-Floto Circus of 1916 featured boxing heavyweight champion, Jess Willard, and wrestler, Frank Gotch, in an exhibition of strength and endurance.

The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art, Tibbals Circus Collection

elephant and tiger act, the star of the show was Buffalo Bill himself. "The veteran scout and showman commanded the usual homage according him as the most distinguished representative of the war and romance of the plains, now forever gone," the *Times* reported. "Real Indians and pure cowboys assist in the show, riding, dancing and fighting around the stage."[56]

Barnum & Bailey was back at Washington and Hill in September, continuing the pattern of returning to California every second year, hopscotching the co-owned Ringling circus which had been on the same showgrounds the previous autumn. But this time the show was different. "The circus is changing," the *Times* reported. "While the old-time glitters, the peanuts, popcorn, red lemonade, spielers and blaring bands are still to be enjoyed, the staging of a magnificent spectacle is taking first place." The story was referring to "The Wizard Prince of Arabia," staged by Alf T. Ringling. The article went on, "In its production 1400 characters are used, including 350 ballet girls in the largest dancing scene ever witnessed in Los Angeles."[57]

The traditional Barnum & Bailey circus acts of 1914 also packed a powerful punch, with Fred Bradna keeping the performance on track as equestrian director for a show that included the Silbon Sisters aerial act, low wire walker Bird Millman, and the Davenport Family equestrian troupe.

Al G. Barnes was the first circus to exhibit in Los Angeles in 1915, booking a charity engagement to benefit The Foresters Association. The show used a different lot that season, setting up at the corner of 12th and Hill, eight blocks from Prager Park. Then, in what had become an annual routine, Sells-Floto again unloaded its train on a Sunday in mid-April, beginning a three day stand at Washington and Hill. Buffalo Bill Cody was back, and with few exceptions the show was essentially that which had been presented on the same lot the year before, including equestrienne Rosa Rosaland and jungle cats trained by Captain Dutch Recardo. Still, if the acts were the same, it did not diminish the enthusiasm of the audience, as performers were greeted with "the largest crowds the aggregation has entertained in recent months."[58]

Although Barnum & Bailey and Ringling Bros. had

been alternating a Los Angeles engagement each year since 1907, neither show visited California in 1915.

The spring of 1916 brought both an old favorite and a new circus to the Prager Park showgrounds. First to arrive was Al G. Barnes, setting up on March 14 with a huge menagerie that included 30 lions handled by Louis Roth and a group of trained zebras. Then, one month later, the John Robinson Circus returned to Los Angeles for the first time since 1892.

In the 1880s and 1890s, the Robinson show had set up a lot closer to downtown, but in 1916, under the ownership of new proprietors, Jerry Mugivan and Bert Bowers, it pitched its tents at the corner of Washington and Hill, on the same grounds Barnes had vacated only a few days earlier. The Robinson circus boasted four rings and two stages, and the featured attraction was the Nelson family of acrobats. Although Robinson's *Ten Big Shows* was new to many in Los Angeles, it was able to garner publicity through a ticket giveaway where 500 children from the Department of County Charities were given free admission to the show, an invitation that was also extended to the city's newsboys.[59]

When this photograph was taken in 1917, the showgrounds at Washington and Hill was known as Prager Park, a reference to Charles and Sam Prager, early Los Angeles developers who owned the property in the early 20th century. Circus World Museum

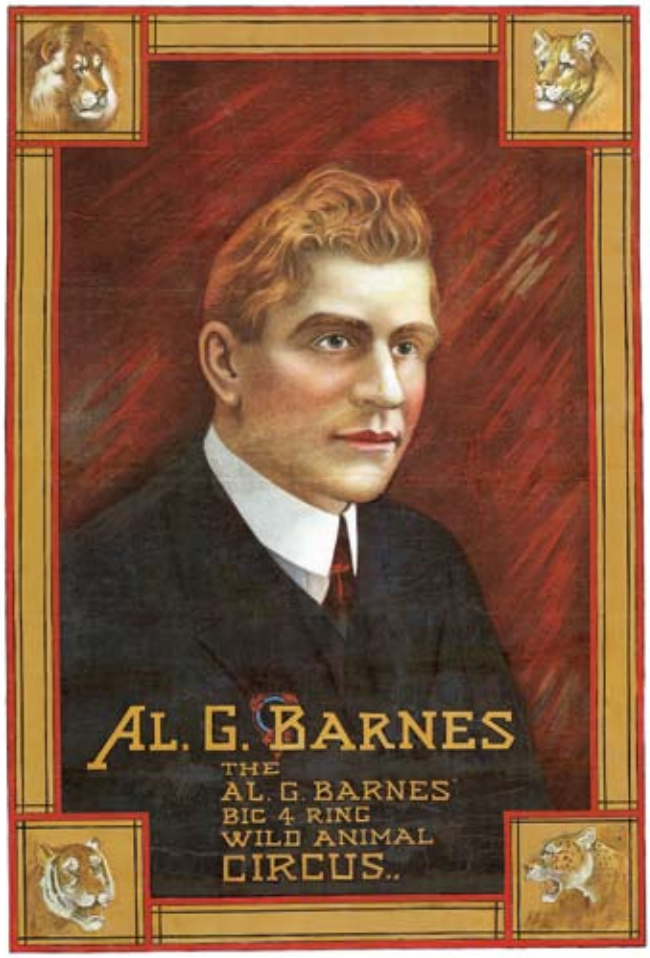
Sells-Floto had customarily played Los Angeles in the spring, but in 1916 it shifted its route and returned to Washington and Hill in mid-October, just three weeks after Barnum & Bailey had set up on the same corner. When *The Greatest Show on Earth* arrived that Sunday, more than 1,000 automobiles were reportedly lining both sides of Hill Street. Though it was still hours before the first wagons appeared, it proved again that the building of the canvas city was entertainment in its own right. In its report on the circus arrival, the *Times* wrote of the men behind the scenes and profiled the activities of boss canvasman "Happy Jack" Snellen as he measured the lot, along with 24-hour man "Big Bill" Conway, who had arrived in town on Saturday, purchasing:

> "40 tons of hay, 1200 bushels of oats, 700 pounds of bran, 21 tons of straw, three tons of alfalfa, 15 bags of ground oats for the baby giraffes, four tubs of boneless fish for the performing cats as well as large quantities of meats, vegetables, eggs, milk, ice cream, fruit and other good things for the men, women and children who eat their meals in the circus cook tent."[60]

After the performance, the *Times* was again enthusiastic in its praise:

> "With the final swelling chord from Ned Brill's band as the Roman chariots flashed across the finish line in the hippodrome race, the Barnum & Bailey circus closed its biennial engagement in this city, with a record attendance of nearly 100,000 during its three day stay.
>
> "Teddy's jumping, Paldren's pyramiding on lamps and the Siegrist-Silbon 'quadrille in the air' were advancements upon previous acts of their kind, and all were inspired and sustained by a colorful musical accompaniment by the splendid band.
>
> " 'Till we meet again' was a sentiment frequently heard as the audience passed out under the fast-dropping canvas."[61]

The Sells-Floto Circus, which arrived on the lot three weeks later, no longer featured Buffalo Bill, who had moved



Alpheus George Barnes Stonehouse was a celebrity in Los Angeles and for nearly 30 consecutive years his "Wild Animal Show" set up each spring at the corner of Washington and Hill. Chris Berry Collection

on to the 101 Ranch Wild West. The new stars were Jess Willard, the heavyweight boxing champion, and Frank Gotch, champion wrestler. Although their exhibitions were the highlight of the show and a new type of circus attraction, the old favorites still played well. "Sells-Floto retains distinction in holding the finest troupe of paced and dancing horses," reported the *Times* adding, "Their acts are under the direction of Rhoda Royal, assisted by Aldine Potter – the poise and grace of both men and women in the saddle giving refreshing pleasure."[62]

At the start of 1917, there was discussion in the local newspapers that Al G. Barnes might be relocating its winter quarters from nearby Venice to Los Angeles proper, something the Chamber of Commerce endorsed. The city fathers were especially interested in the idea of a public attraction that would "provide a pleasing attraction to the thousands of tourists here each season."[63] After opening the 1917 season in Santa Monica, the circus moved to the lot at Washington and Hill and despite arriving a day earlier than advertised, the show still attracted a large crowd.

As the *Times* reported, "the wild animal show had no sooner entered the city when that swiftest of news agencies, the small boy, circulated the news. As a result attendance in the big tent was well filled with spectators."[64] The success of the Los Angeles opening was reinforced three days later when the newspaper reported that the city "gave the circus a larger audience than ever before."[65]

Despite the abundance of circuses the previous year, the entry of the United States into World War I in April 1917 and the subsequent railroad restrictions impacted outdoor entertainment. It was not until late August when word began spreading that the Ringling Bros. World's Greatest Shows would be arriving in Los Angeles in a matter of weeks. Regardless of wartime austerity, press agents claimed, "The circus programme has not been cut and 480 artists are included." The lithographs and other announcements promoted May Wirth, along with 60 clowns, a zoo of 103 cages, 41 elephants, 38 camels and the story of Cinderella, with a cast that "includes 1250 actors, 735 horses and 300 dancing girls."[66]

Once again the four Ringling trains arrived at the Southern Pacific Railroad yards early on a Sunday morning, and while most of the tents were in place by noon, the big top was not erected until Monday morning, "in order that the workingman may have as much of a holiday as possible."[67]

The War in Europe continued to dominate the attention of the world in 1918, as men and materiel were scooped up by factories and the armed forces. Still, some circuses continued to make their way west and those shows that did found enthusiastic and responsive audiences.

Al G. Barnes was again the first to arrive that spring, traveling a short distance from its winter quarters in nearby Venice to pitch its tents at the corner of Washington and Hill on the morning of March 21. The circus appearance was marked by a minor "Hey Rube," when a group of locals battled with the show's working men prior to the matinee performance on Friday, March 22. According to the *Times,* "several score small boys were making a frantic effort to go under the big top and sneak into the circus tents, when a crew of roustabouts, whose ambition in life, as one of the victims later told police, is to 'keep a fellow out of a circus,' discovered the attempt and blocked it." Police reported that the boys were well supplied with rocks and threw a barrage at and around the circus workers. Two of the boys were ar-

Among the several hundred horses traveling with the Sells-Floto Circus of 1919 was the stallion "Sunrise," reportedly acquired for the circus by sportswriter Otto Floto while in Morocco. The horse was said to weigh 1,150 pounds and was ridden in the street parade by "Sunset," a "comely and costumed circus girl."

The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art, Tibbals Circus Collection

rested after the skirmish and booked by police at the Los Angeles Central Station.[68]

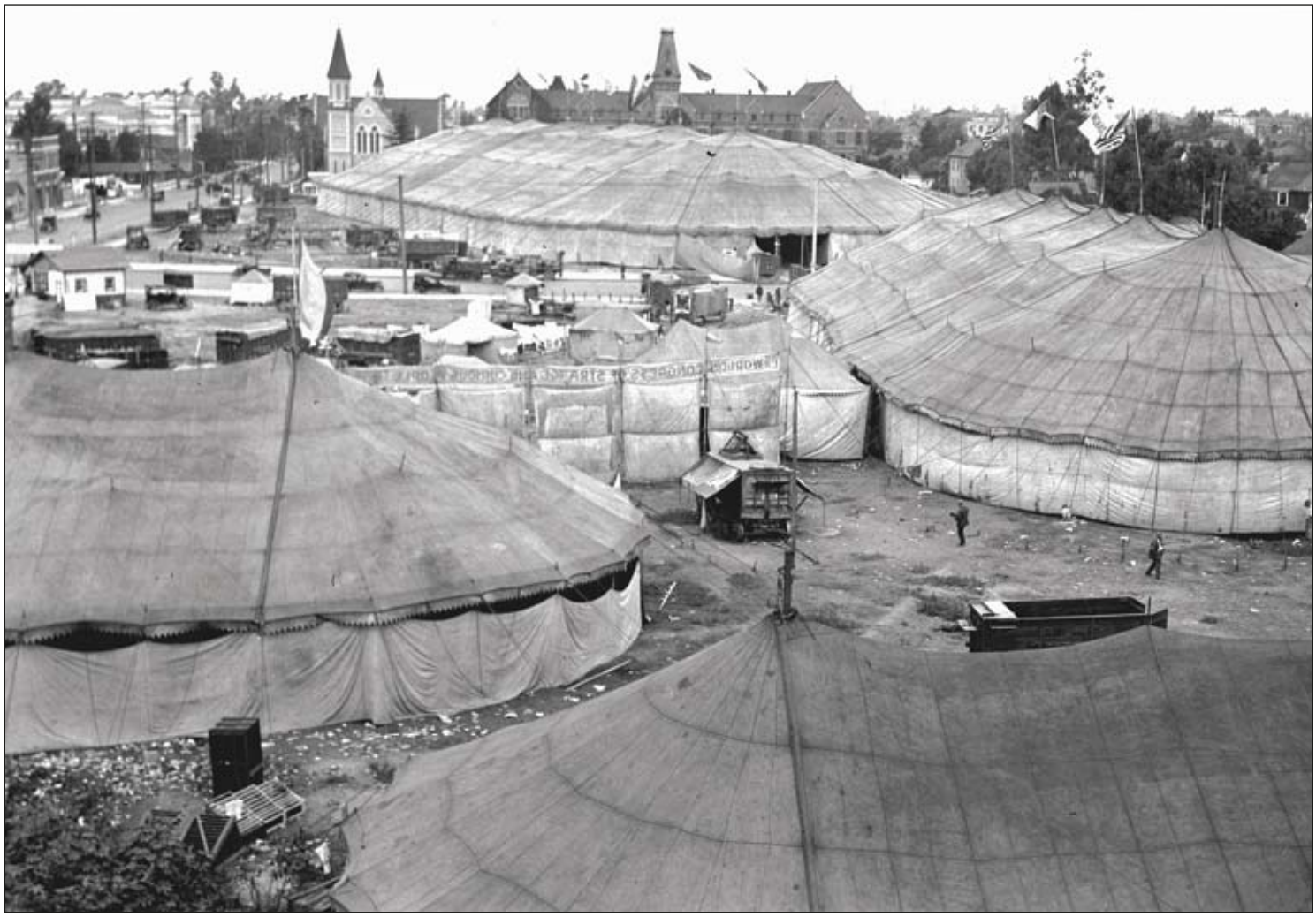
Had those youngsters paid for their tickets they would have seen a performance that was praised by the *Times* and which focused on wild animals. "After seeing Barnes' wonderfully trained animals, it is difficult longer to doubt the theory of evolution, but one is at a loss to decide whether man descended from the monkey, the horse, the lion, the tiger, the elephant, the seal or the big pig."[69]

About the same time Barnes left Prager Park to continue its 1918 tour, brightly colored lithographs began appearing for the Sells-Floto Circus that would be returning to Washington and Hill after a one-year absence. Coincidentally, the theory of evolution was also a topic in the Sells-Floto promotion. The show advertised "Colossus," a gorilla that was described as "Half Man – Half Beast, a scientific mystery of creation that walks upright like a man and crumbles bricks in one hand." In addition, the press agents promised "20 Elephants Executing the Latest Terpsichordean Steps," and "Sunrise, Positively the Most Marvelous Looking Piece of Horseflesh in Existence," along with the spec "Birth of the Rainbow," a story "Goblins and Fairies tell us, where the Rainbow reaches the Earth, you will find a Pot of Gold."[70] During the stay in Los Angeles a monkey escaped from the menagerie and remained at large for two days after the show had left town. Eventually the monkey was located under a nearby house where it was captured by police and "forwarded to the circus."[71]

In the summer of 1918, newspapers in Los Angeles and around the world were filled with the latest war news, along with first word of an influenza epidemic that ultimately would kill as many as 50 million people worldwide. Those same newspapers also printed stories about the tragedy that struck Hagenbeck-Wallace on June 22, when a sleeping engineer slammed his locomotive into the circus train outside of Hammond, Indiana, killing 86 and injuring another 127. Although Hagenbeck-Wallace had never been to Los Angeles, its predecessor, The Great Wallace Shows had, and the story was big news as the investigation of the wreck continued that summer.

The summer of 1918 also brought an unusual attraction to Los Angeles when 18 carloads of German war trophies arrived in the city on August 1. In an interesting twist, the airplanes, tanks, guns and trucks were exhibited only a few blocks from the circus showgrounds at Washington and Hill, and the display was organized by former Barnum & Bailey, Ringling Bros. and Buffalo Bill manager Fred Hutchinson.[72]

Although a special train had been used to bring the war paraphernalia to Los Angeles, travel restrictions made it more difficult for the Ringling brothers to route their two large shows. Still, Barnum & Bailey did make one final swing through the West Coast that September before clos-



This photograph shows the Barnum & Bailey layout crowded onto Prager Park for its final appearance there in September of 1918. The lot was cut in two by Hill Street, with the big top on the northwest side of the street and the sideshow and menagerie on the southeast side in the foreground. Circus World Museum

ing early and returning to the Bridgeport winter quarters where it would regroup and be combined with Ringling Bros. for the 1919 season.

The Greatest Show on Earth had visited Los Angeles seven times since its first trip to Washington and Hill in 1905, but the appearance in 1918 was the final one before consolidating with Ringling Bros. While the spec "Aladdin and His Wonderful Lamp" was given top billing in 1918, circus press agents, led by Dexter Fellows, were promoting the fact that the show setup was executed in a "military manner," and all of the great European acts, including the Hanneford family of equestrians, were in America and would soon be arriving in Los Angeles.[73] The newspapers also made mention of the fact that the show had lost a number of featured performers to the war effort, including trapeze artists Charles Silbon and B. T. Siegrist, along with acrobats Earl Ellis and Harry Peare, and clown Jerry Clayton.[74] Clayton was one of the first circus performers to make the supreme sacrifice. He was killed in France August 13, 1918, just a little over a month before the circus arrived in Los Angeles.[75]

When Al G. Barnes opened at Prager Park on March 27, it was billed as running three hours, and included the new spec, "Alice in Jungleland." The jam-packed show featured fresh acts imported from Europe, and promoted a cast of 600 people and 1,200 animals.[76]

The only other circus to exhibit at Prager Park in 1919 was Hagenbeck-Wallace, making its first trip to California. Following the previous summer's deadly train wreck, the show that was billed as *The Highest Class Circus in the World* made its first visit to Washington and Hill. One of the stars on the show that year was equestrienne Gladys German, who in addition to her work with the circus was promoted as an "honor graduate of Vassar, showgirl in a Broadway production, artist's model and a favorite with Newport so-

ciety as an entertainer."[77] Whether the West Coast route was successful or not is unknown, but it should be noted that Hagenbeck-Wallace did not return to Los Angeles for nearly 20 years.

The 1920s

Circuses were not the only attraction at Prager Park in its decades as a showground. In early 1920, one of America's first large automobile shows was set up on the lot, followed by the Clarence A. Wortham railroad carnival that arrived in February. Al G. Barnes followed the 35-car carnival and was the only big circus to play Los Angeles in 1920. The carefree attitude of "The Roaring 20s" was already making itself known at the start of the decade, as Barnes promised that the show would feature "pretty girls in next-to-nothing dancing in the lions' cage," and as the *Times* explained, "judging from the press agent's pictures of the girls, it will be some attraction. The girls are easy to look at and there are plenty of 'em – in fact, except for a few breadths of ribbon, they are just plain, unadorned girls, au naturel."[78]

Whether it was the nubile showgirls, or the fact that Southern California was circus-starved, in 1921 Al G. Barnes extended its run from three to six days, again featuring the long-running spec "Alice in Jungleland" along with "30 Lions in One Big Act" and "20 Performing Bengal and Siberian Tigers," thereby promising "Every Act and Every Animal an Attraction."[79] The performance in 1921 featured a veteran team of trainers including Martha Florine who had 15 years of experience with the show, and Vera Lindsay in her fifth season, and Mabel Stark, who had been with the circus for nine years.[80]

For the first time in many years, Mabel Starks' former husband and animal trainer Louis Roth was not with Barnes in 1921, as he had been hired by Jerry Mugivan and Bert Bowers during the off-season to be headliner on their Howe's Great London Circus, a year when the Mugivan and Bowers partnership fielded four circuses. The 30-car railroad show was routed to the West Coast that spring where it clashed with Al G. Barnes in 32 California towns, arriving at Washington and Hill less than a month after Barnes had left Los Angeles.[81]

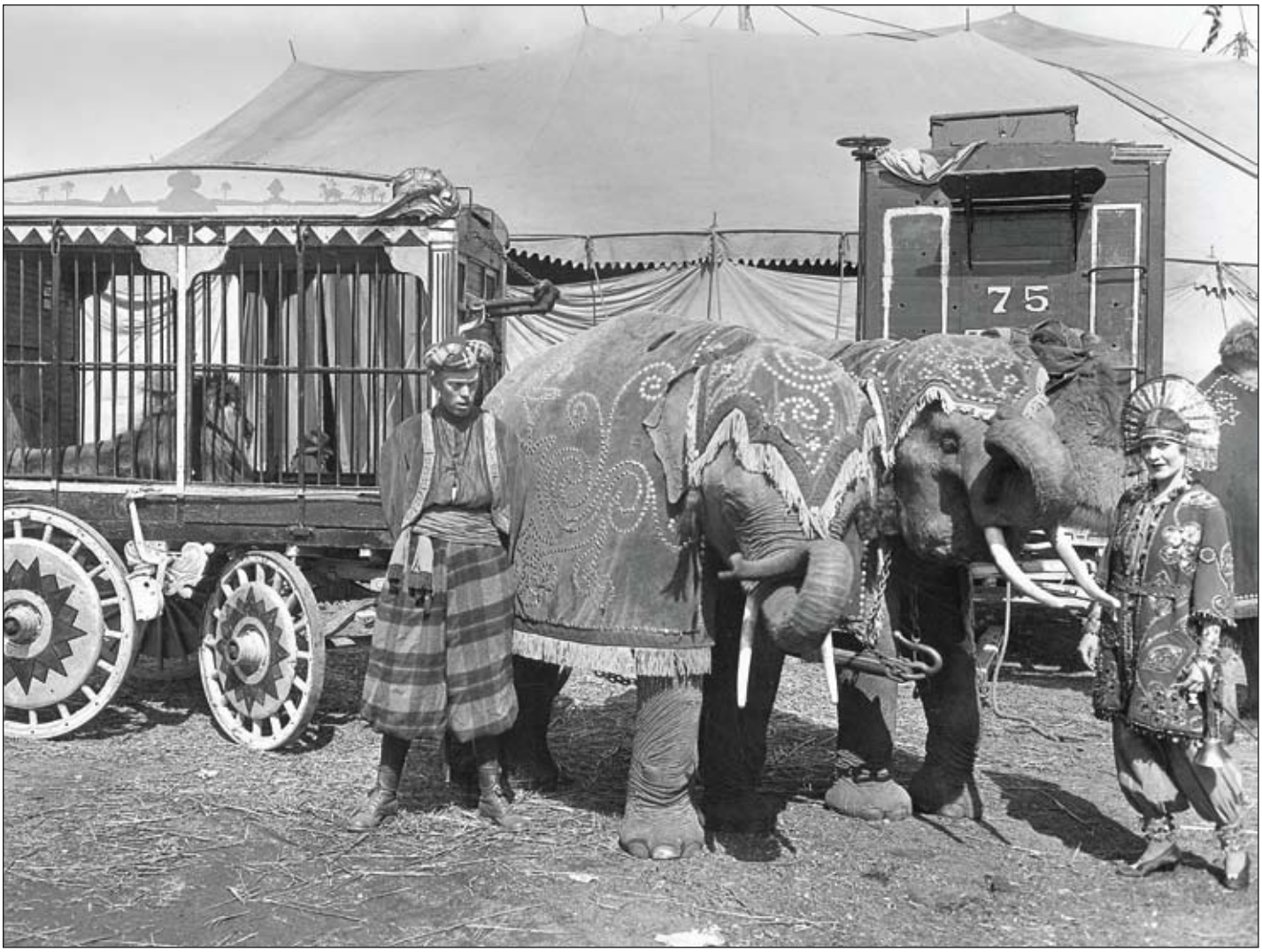
Less than a year after the train wreck that claimed 86 lives in 1918, the Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus made its first trip to Los Angeles. It would not return to the lot until 1938.

Chris Berry Collection

The Howe's Great London Circus and Van Amburg's Trained Wild Animals that played Los Angeles in April 1921 included not only veteran trainer Louis Roth, but also others who would make circus history in the years to come, including future Cole Bros. owner Jess Adkins as treasurer, and Frank Braden on the advance. A young clown named Emmett Kelly also made his first appearance at Washington and Hill that spring.[82]

The 1921 season was the biggest ever for the team of Mugivan and Bowers which operated not only Howe's Great London but also Hagenbeck-Wallace, John Robinson and their newly acquired Sells-Floto Circus, which followed Howe's to Washington and Hill only six months later. The arrival that fall heralded the return of Sells-Floto to Los Angeles for the first time since the end of World War I, and the lineup was spectacular. The Hanneford Troupe, featuring Poodles, was heavily promoted, along with wire artists "Princess Victoria" Codona and Berta Beeson. Others on the bill in 1921 were the Nelsons acrobatic troupe and the Flying Codonas trapeze act.[83]

Sells-Floto arrived in Los Angeles only three weeks after its ticket wagon had been robbed of $30,000 at a performance in Vancouver, Washington, and a Los Angeles newspaper article warned any would-be thieves that the rack above the ticket window held a heavy revolver and two magazine rifles.[84] The newspapers also made note that there were several Mack trucks with the show and that during the street parade one of them hauled the hippopotamus wagon through the streets of downtown Los Angeles.[85]



The "Alice in Jungleland" spec had been a feature for two seasons when this photograph was taken at Washington and Hill in 1921. That season the circus extended its Los Angeles run from three to six days. Circus World Museum

By the time the Al G. Barnes Circus opened at Washington and Hill on March 15, 1922, the show had relocated its winter quarters from Venice to nearby Culver City. The show also added another day to its annual run, providing Los Angeles with 14 performances that featured Tusko, billed as the biggest elephant in the world, along with Lotus, possibly the most famous of circus hippos.

The hippopotamus, which waddled around the hippodrome track at Prager Park that season, later became a feature in the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey menagerie. Lotus was the same hippo that famously appeared in the winter quarters scene of Cecil B. DeMille's 1952 film, *The Greatest Show on Earth.*[86]

Missing from the Al G. Barnes program in 1922 was Mabel Stark, who had been a part of the show for over a decade. Following the 1921 season, Stark was hired by Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey where she was a center ring attraction when she returned to Los Angeles that fall. The 1922 Al G. Barnes engagement was also marked by a number of charity events. The final day of performances was dedicated to Spanish-American War veterans and Barnes donated the proceeds from 5,000 tickets to their convention fund.[87] In another promotion that generated publicity for the show, a special one-ring circus was set up to entertain patients at the Los Angeles Children's Hospital.[88]

The 1922 season is notable because of the extended nation-wide battle between Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey and Sells-Floto. For much of the season they crossed each other's territory. Sells-Floto was in Philadelphia on May 1, only to be followed by Ringling-Barnum a week later on May 8. Sells-Floto was first into Boston on May 29, with

Poodles Hanneford performed in Los Angeles during his second season with Barnum & Bailey in 1916, and over the years returned many times. Circus patrons at Washington and Hill also saw Poodles' comedy riding act on Ringling-Barnum, the Charity Circus of 1923, Al G. Barnes, Hagenbeck-Wallace, and Sells-Floto, which created this window card for the 1921 season. Circus World Museum

After decades with no wild animal acts, the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus of 1923 featured six, with Mabel Stark in the center ring. The "African Jungle Circus" promised a big trained animal show "gratuitously added." Chris Berry Collection

Ringling arriving two weeks later on June 12. Throughout the spring and summer, the two shows struggled for audience superiority, but perhaps nowhere were the stakes higher than in Los Angeles, where the Ringlings had not fielded a circus since 1918.

Ringling-Barnum spent much of the summer of 1922 working its way across Canada without opposition until August when both circuses arrived in the Pacific Northwest. The battle was back on. In California, Sells-Floto was first into San Francisco on August 24, followed by Ringling on September 1. When Ringling leased the lot at Prager Park for performances beginning September 11, Mugivan and Bowers brazenly booked Sells-Floto onto the same lot exactly one week prior on September 4.

The competition was intense. As early as July, two months before the shows arrived, articles began appearing in the Los Angeles newspapers, followed by lithographs trumpeting the arrival of Sells-Floto. They were then matched by massive billing stands urging Los Angeles to "WAIT!" for Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey.

Among the stories that were skillfully placed in Los Angeles newspapers was a feature on the children of the Sells-Floto circus. The article profiled several youngsters who would later become circus stars in their own right, returning to the same lot at Washington and Hill years later after they too learned the family business. The children of the Hobsons and the Nelsons, along with two-year-old Gracie Hanneford, were all profiled in the article that also told about the nannies and teachers who traveled with Sells-Floto.[89]

The Ringling-Barnum advance responded with stories which focused on the size of the combined show. Read-

The enormity of Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Combined Shows is captured in this photograph from 1922, as acres of what had been vacant land are crowded with tents. The cookhouse appears in the foreground, and the big top has been staked out diagonally to fit the lot.

Circus World Museum

ers were reminded that the big top seated 15,000 and the Ringling menagerie tent was "larger than the big top of any other circus." In 1922, Prager Park lot was divided by Hill Street, the big top erected on the lot between Grand Avenue and Hill, the menagerie between Hill and Main Streets, and auxiliary tents placed on other vacant lots in the area.[90]

The Ringling show received the lion's share of printer's ink, including a feature on a private performance given to more than 100 children on the lawn of the Orthopedic Hospital. The reporter detailed the acts and spoke of Fred Bradna leading a mini-circus that included clowns George Hartzell and Felix Adler, along with Mrs. Roy Rush and her trained dogs, Frank Huling and a trained seal, and other acts, all performing to the accompaniment of the circus band under the direction of 31-year old Merle Evans during his first visit to Los Angeles with Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey.[91]

Despite the expense and effort that was poured into the battle with Sells-Floto, it appears that Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey came out on top of the California campaign, as Mugivan and Bowers did not route Sells-Floto back to Los Angeles until 1926 and the Ringling show returned to Prager Park the following year.

When Ringling-Barnum returned to Washington and Hill in September 1923, the performance was heavy with the type of wild animal acts made famous over the previous decade by Al G. Barnes during his many visits to the lot. The 100 railway cars were unloaded at the Santa Fe yards and it took an entire morning to transfer their contents to Prager Park. In addition to star performers such as Lillian Leitzel, Beatrice Sweeney and the Clarkonian trapeze act, three steel arenas were set up with presentations by Mabel

In the mid-1920s, a temporary wooden viaduct was constructed over Hill Street to convey patrons from the menagerie and sideshow tents to the big top. The bridge, shown in this view looking southeast in 1925, was designed to accommodate the huge crowds and to protect pedestrians who had dodged traffic at this location in the past.

Chris Berry Collection

Stark, Rudolph Matthies, Captain Ricardo, Bruno Radtke and the Schroeders. Other performing animals on the show that season included the Pallenberg bears, the Huling seals and trained poodles presented by Alfred Loyal.

The Ringling-Barnum five-day stand in 1923 came between two unusual circuses that provided bookends for the season, both of which also exhibited at Washington and Hill. Charity circuses had long been a part of the Los Angeles entertainment scene going back to 1908 when Sell-Floto had produced one of America's very first Shrine Circuses on the lot at Washington and Hill. In early 1923 came word of a new charity performance that would be held on the showgrounds, managed by a member of one of the most prominent circus families of the 19th century.

Sheldon H. Barrett Jr., nephew to the Sells brothers and son of one of the owners and the namesake of S. H. Barrett's New Monster Shows, had relocated from Ohio to Los Angeles several years earlier, and in March of 1923 it was announced that he would be the General Manager of the "Charity Circus" that would be held in a tent at Washington and Hill May 4-13, with 100 percent of the proceeds going to the Los Angeles Children's Hospital.

The show was supported by Hollywood's elite, including appearances by Charlie Chaplin, Cecil B. DeMille, Douglas Fairbanks and Tom Mix.[92] As part of the show promotion, a torchlight parade was held through downtown Los Angeles on opening night. The circus starred Poodles Hanneford, May Wirth and the Siegrist-Silbon family of aerialists.[93] After the proceeds were tallied, a check for just over $27,000 was presented to the hospital by the organizers.[94]

While it did not pack the same star-power as the Charity Circus, nor did it have the name recognition of Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey, the Jinnistan Grotto Circus boasted a big top "two blocks long" at the corner of Washington and Hill in December 1923. Although the Grotto Circus was designed to provide a benefit to the Masonic Home for Orphaned Children in Covina, the managing director of the circus was arrested during a vice raid on one of the performances, accused of soliciting illegal gambling

This view, also from 1925, shows the other side of the viaduct from street level. Striped sidewall canvas provides a safety barrier. Note the stake line in the foreground that was placed tight against the edge of the sidewalk.

Circus World Museum

101 Ranch brought a traditional wild west performance to Washington and Hill in 1927. Circus World Museum

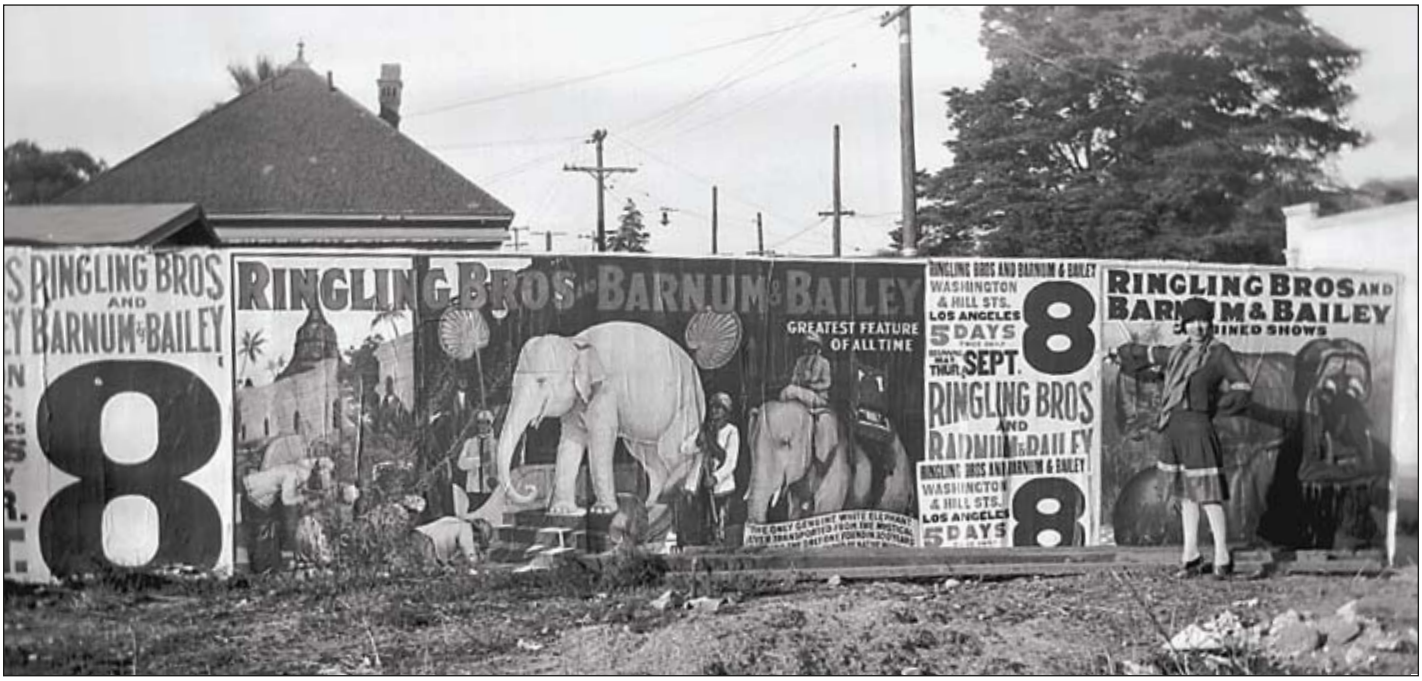
at the show. After a jury trial, A. W. Shaw was cleared on all charges.[95]

As the Al G. Barnes Circus prepared for its Washington and Hill opening in May of 1924, the newspapers were buzzing about new construction that was planned on the block. A 14 story building, designed as a hotel, was to be constructed at a cost of more than $2 million.[96] The building, on the north side of Washington Boulevard was completed in 1927, and later it was purchased by the Mode O'Day Company and used as a headquarters for the clothing chain. Some 90 years later, the building remains an identifiable landmark in many photographs, and for years it was used as a perch for photographers who captured images of various tents and midways across the street.

When Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey returned to the lot in September 1925, groundbreaking for the high-rise was still in the planning stages, and the circus again faced the challenge of laying out acres of tents on several small parcels. In previous years the arrangement had required circus employees and patrons to dodge traffic as they crossed busy streets. However, this time a temporary viaduct was constructed across Hill Street to move the enormous crowds from the menagerie and sideshow to the big top which was located across the street. The use of this temporary bridge allowed thousands of patrons to cross over without impeding vehicular traffic. For four days the tents were packed, with 25,000 attending the two performances on opening day. Among those in attendance were Calvin Coolidge's Vice President Charles Dawes, and U.S. Senator Frank Flint.[97]

When Al G. Barnes stepped off its season in 1926, the high-rise construction project was underway, and for the first time the circus was set-up across Washington Boulevard on the south side of the street. A huge promotional event was held on the "new" lot, featuring Tarzan author Edgar Rice Burroughs as honorary ringmaster and a personal appearance by heavyweight boxing champion Jack Dempsey.

From opening day it appeared the show was jinxed. Hemina Atayde, who performed an aerial ladder act was seriously injured when she fell from her perch at the season's first matinee.[98] The next day, after seven years without an accident, veteran trainer Louis Roth was seriously mauled by a new tiger named Rosey during the cat's first appearance in front of a large audience.[99] Before the show left Southern California, a performer named Bernice Collins suffered two broken ribs when the howdah she was riding in slipped off an elephant's back. A canvasman was also



Billposters for Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey brought the promise of exotic animals to Los Angeles in the summer of 1927, promoting the menagerie and Pawah, the white elephant that traveled with the circus that season.

Circus World Museum

injured by a falling pole on the showgrounds, and three men were critically injured when their car struck the circus train as the show left the city.[100]

From all accounts, there were no major problems for Sells-Floto when the show returned to Washington and Hill the following September. Poodles Hanneford, who had performed on the lot dozens of times since his first visit to Los Angeles a decade before, was the headliner, and once again he received rave reviews: "That darn-fool riding clown was a favorite of the crowd," the *Times* said. "Hanneford, with three fine white horses and five other riders, provoked roars of laughter by his grotesque antics on and off the horses and in and out of the ring." Poodles received thunderous applause from those in attendance, and "was called back to the ring again and again."[101]

It was just one week later that Miller Bros. 101 Ranch Real Wild West and Great Far East arrived on the Washington and Hill lot with a traditional wild west show, along with circus acts. The appearance of the 101 Ranch was also marked by a new kind of promotion for an outdoor show when KHJ radio welcomed to the air "six towering Indian chieftains, an Indian princess and an entourage of women and babies." The group broadcast Native American songs and told stories to a small but growing Southern California radio audience.[102]

Even before the 1927 season started, Al G. Barnes was in the news announcing that he was selling his "Barnes City" winter quarters and moving the circus east to property he had purchased between Baldwin Park and El Monte. Barnes said the old quarters, which would be annexed by Culver City, "had become entirely too valuable for a circus."[103] Six weeks later, Southern California's hometown circus arrived on the Washington and Hill lot where the featured attraction was the spectacle "Aladdin and the Parade of Gold."

After a two-year absence, Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey arrived in late August 1927 with a performance that featured some of the great circus acts of the late 1920s. May Wirth, Lillian Leitzel, Alfredo Codona, Berta Beeson, Con Colleano, the Yacopis and "Pawah," the sacred white elephant, all made their way to Washington and Hill that summer, as the show delivered five days of performances, to date the longest Los Angeles run for *The Greatest Show on Earth.*

In the late 1920s, comedian Charlie Chaplin was a worldwide superstar, and at the start of 1928 his performance in *The Circus* was a huge hit on the silver screen. The motion picture was filmed just a few miles from the fabled lot where authentic circuses played Los Angeles each season, and less than a month after the blockbuster silent picture premiered, Al G. Barnes was granted a permit to return to Washington and Hill.

Before he opened his annual tour in March, Barnes made a bold move, expanding his route to Hawaii. In late January 1928, 50 Al G. Barnes performers, along with as-

The center poles are up and final preparations are being made to raise the Sells-Floto big top for a five-day stand in September 1928. This photo, looking south, was taken from an upper floor of the new high-rise building that was constructed on Washington Boulevard the year before. The building would later become identified as the Mode O'Day building. Hill Street is on the right. Circus World Museum

sorted animals and working men, travelled to Oahu for a three-ring circus sponsored by the Honolulu Elks Club. The circus featured a traditional sideshow, equestrians, elephants and a wild animal act trained by Capt. John Meyer. The reception for Al G. Barnes Circus' ten-day stand in Honolulu was extraordinary as the show featured animals and acts that had never been seen in Hawaii, and thousands were turned away from the sold-out performances.[104]

Al G. Barnes returned to Los Angeles in time to begin the regular season with a clown alley that featured Toby Tyler, Dutch March, Bill Ward, Jack McAfee, Danny McAvoy, Bozo Pizzo, Frank Cherry and Milt Taylor.[105]

When Sells-Floto played a five-day stand at Washington and Hill in late September, the show reached out to the community throughout its stay. One of the events had bandmaster Victor Robbins inviting the city's "playgrounds band" to provide a concert under the big top during a performance on September 28.[106]

Even before the 1929 outdoor season started, the circus world was speculating about the sale in January of the Al G. Barnes Circus to the American Circus Corporation of Peru, Indiana for "around $1,000,000."[107] Despite the new ownership, the decade ended at Washington and Hill much the same way it had started. While some of the performers were different, the Al G. Barnes show that arrived on the lot in early April included a number of familiar faces and acts. Although Betty Kenyon had replaced Mabel Stark in her wrestling match with a tiger named "Rajah," the spec

The landmark Mode O'Day building is seen in this photograph from 1931 where the Al G. Barnes lions and tigers are being fed prior to a matinee performance. The seven cage wagons positioned end-to-end, also served as a runway to the chutes that led to the steel arenas in the big top. Circus World Museum

"Aladdin" returned for another season, led by the giant male elephant "Tusko," and featuring trainers Louis Roth and John Myers.[108]

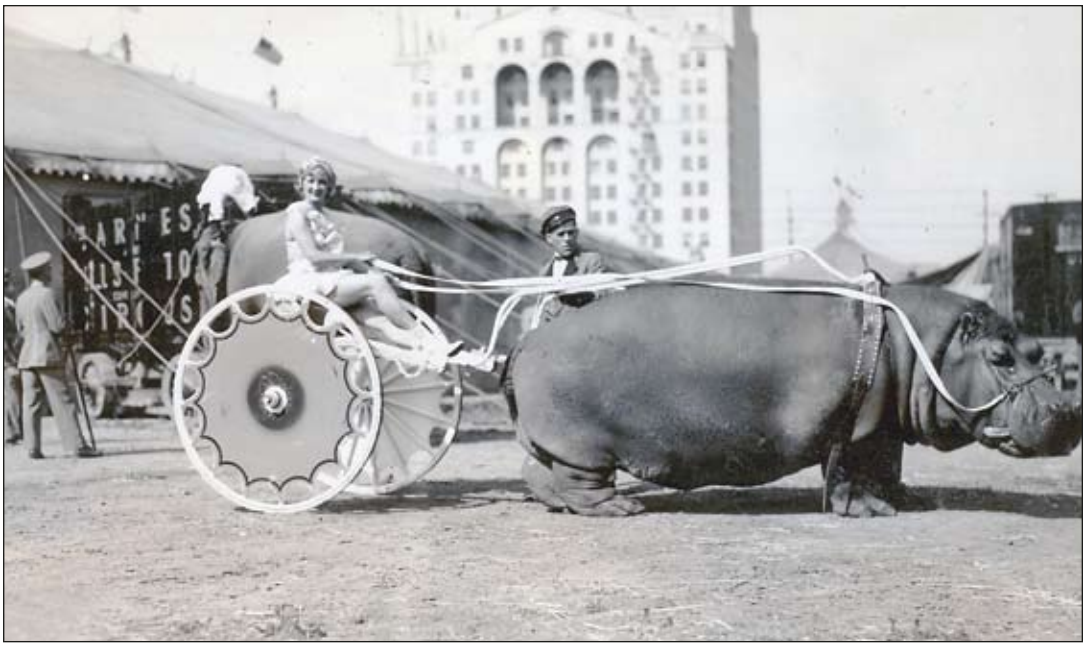
When Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey arrived at the showgrounds September 12, it too had its share of returning acts, including Leitzel, Codona and Bradna, but it was two stupendous new features, Hugo Zacchini's cannon act and the Wallenda high-wire act, that packed a mighty punch for those attending the circus, the last time the Big One would play Washington and Hill.

Not all of the backyard gossip that September centered on the performance, however. When the show was in Los Angeles, John Ringling generated his own headlines when he acquired control of the American Circus Corporation, adding Sells-Floto, Hagenbeck-Wallace, Sparks, John Robinson and Al G. Barnes to his portfolio.[109] A month later, the Circus King's fortunes were thrown into disarray when the American stock market lost $30 billion dollars over two days, a precursor to the start of The Great Depression and Ringling ultimately losing control of his circus empire.[110]

The 1930s

Just a few days into the start of the new decade, John Ringling promised that he would be spending big money to get the Barnes circus ready for its spring opener at Washington and Hill. An army of workmen was reportedly working to prepare the show at the Baldwin Park winter quarters. New equipment was purchased to rebuild and repair wagons and cages, while painters, carpenters and blacksmiths were being hired to prepare for the 1930 tour.[111]

Throughout the 1930s the Barnes show played its annual engagement at its primary lot at Washington and Hill,



Lotus, possibly the most famous hippopotamus in circus history, is seen here prior to an appearance on the Al G. Barnes and Sells-Floto hippodrome track in 1937.

Circus World Museum

and beginning in 1932 the show added two additional lots, at Crenshaw and Exposition and Fairfax and Wilshire. In 1937, five years after it left the road, the Sells-Floto title was added to the Barnes equipment, an arrangement that continued when the show opened in 1938. However, the combination of those historic titles was short-lived, and on the night of April 10, 1938, the Barnes Sells-Floto Circus left the showgrounds at Washington and Hill for the last time, 28 years after Barnes himself first leased the lot.

As the Al G. Barnes tradition came to a close in the mid-1930s, another legacy was beginning. On September 20, 1936, the Cole Bros. Circus made its first trip to Los Angeles and Clyde Beatty gave his first performance at the corner of Washington and Hill. Although Beatty was already a household name because of his films "The Big Cage," "The Lost Jungle" and "Darkest Africa," this was the first time he had appeared in person with a circus in Los Angeles. If Al G. Barnes had been the hometown favorite for the first three decades of the 20th century, a new generation of Angelenos was embracing the youthful enthusiasm of Beatty.

The Cole Bros. debut in Los Angeles was also notable because it featured the city's first circus parade in twelve years. A reporter for the *Times* described the scene as "keeping with the spirit of the 1890s" as he spoke of 17 elephants parading trunk-to-tail along with another seven pulling cage wagons. He closed his report by describing the parade's conclusion, "as smoke belched from its stack, a real steam calliope started to snort that 'corny' music that warms the blood of the circus addict."[112]

When Cole Bros. returned to Washington and Hill in 1937, a lavish press party was held at the cookhouse where P. G. Lowery's sideshow band provided the entertainment as Clyde Beatty and Ken Maynard met with reporters and newsreel photographers. A number of leading Hollywood types were also in attendance including Spencer Tracy, Mickey Rooney, Boris Karloff, Cary Grant, Dick Powell and Barbara Stanwyck, to name a few.[113] Another guest that night was Vittoria Mussolini, son of Il Duce, who was photographed with Emmett Kelly and Otto Griebling.[114]

Although Cole Bros. did not tour the West Coast during its shortened season of 1938, the only circus other than Al G. Barnes and Sells-Floto to exhibit at Washington and Hill that spring carried a title that had not been seen in Los Angeles since 1919.

Hagenbeck-Wallace, now leased by the Ringling interests to Howard Y. Bary, arrived in Los Angeles on September 2. After six days of well attended performances at Washington and Hill, the 28 cars of the circus were shuttled on the Pacific Electric to the Hollywood lot at Wilshire and Fairfax. The show, which featured Poodles Hanneford and the animal hypnotist-trainer Blacaman, had survived the entire 1938 season only to be seized for unpaid debts by the County Sheriff when the show arrived in Riverside on September 21. Just a few weeks after its performances at Washington and Hill the tents were folded for the last time and Hagenbeck-Wallace closed forever.[115]

With Al G. Barnes, Sells-Floto and Hagenbeck-Wallace no longer touring, and the Cole Bros. western route ending in the Dakotas, the Los Angeles circus fan of 1939 was somewhat starved for entertainment until Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey rolled into town in September. Still, no circuses exhibited at Washington and Hill during the final year of the 1930s, as Ringling-Barnum again chose to

The first truck circus to play Washington and Hill was Russell Bros. in the spring of 1942. The ten-day engagement brought packed houses to the 5,000 seat tent and is memorable for a wartime blackout that occurred during the evening performance on April 8. Note that the southward extension of Broadway (upper left) had substantially narrowed the lot from the one that had existed in the late 1920s. Circus World Museum

The "Hindu animal hypnotist" Blacaman was a featured attraction on Howard Y. Bary's Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus of 1938. Less than a month after its performances at Washington and Hill, the circus closed forever. Circus World Museum

At right, the Russell Bros. Circus played the Washington and Hill lot for ten days in 1942. It was the pinnacle of success for owners Claude and Pauline Webb, who sold their circus to Art Concello at the end of the season. Chris Berry Collection

set up at the "new" lot, seven miles west, at the corner of Crenshaw and Exposition.[116]

The 1940s

With World War II underway in Europe, factories in the United States were springing back to life in the early 1940s, and that included Southern California's shipyards and a burgeoning aviation industry. For those who managed circuses or performed under the big top, the dark days of the 1930s were coming to a close. Though there were now only two railroad shows on the road, both Cole Bros. and Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey were again traveling from coast-to-coast.

As The Great Depression came to an end, Cole Bros. was back at Washington and Hill in 1940, returning again in 1942, 1943, 1944 and 1946. Since Clyde Beatty was no longer with Cole Bros., Hollywood Western star Ken Maynard was the headliner in 1940 on a circus that featured Otto Griebling, the Reiffenach Riding Troupe and the Escalante family of acrobats. During the engagement at Washington and Hill that fall, equestrienne Wanda Wentz was thrown from a horse, suffering a broken arm, and former Ringling star Dorothy Herbert was flown to Los Angeles to fill in for the remainder of the season.[117]

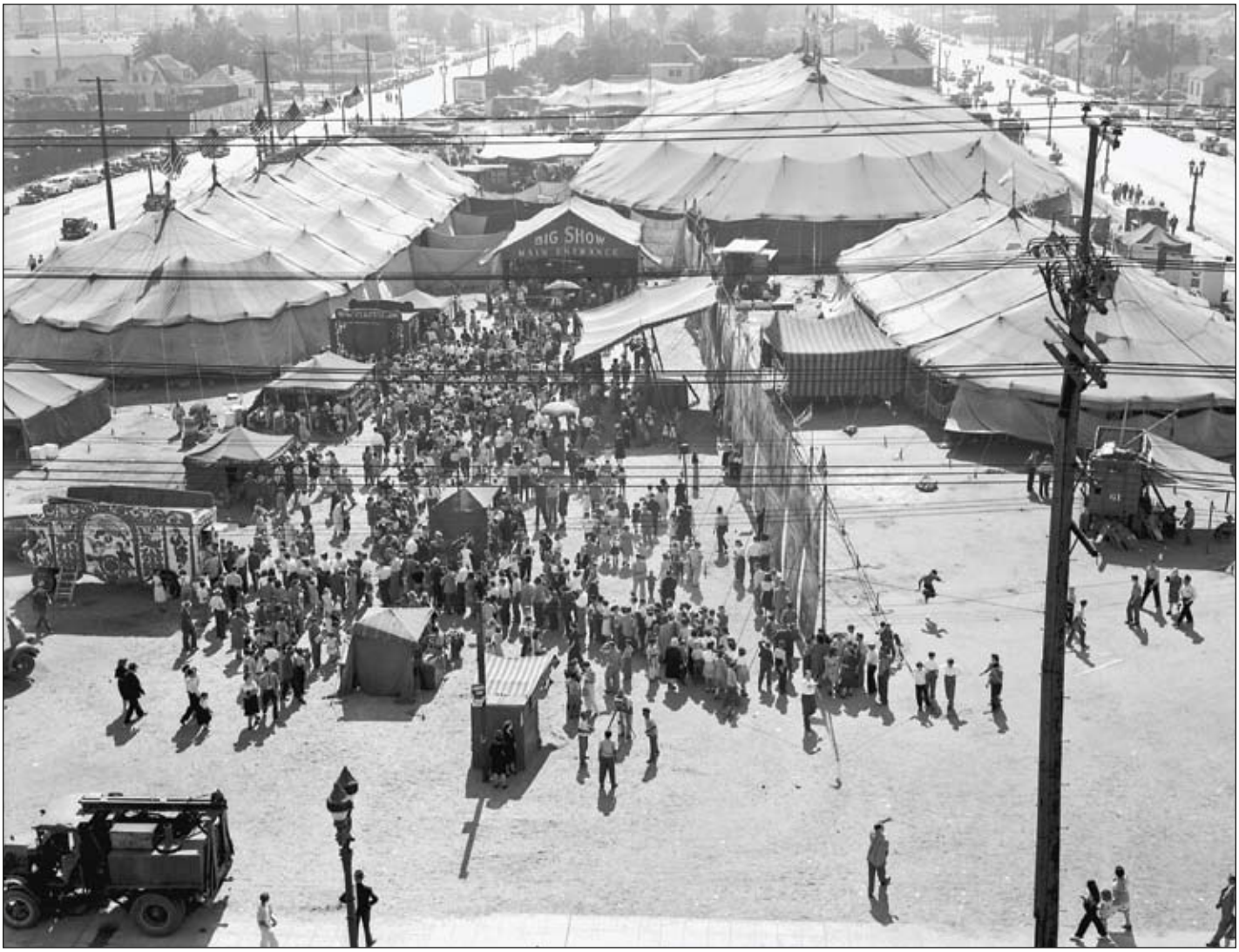
The spring of 1942 brought a new type of circus to Washington and Hill. On April 3 the Russell Bros. Circus became the first truck show to play the lot, and for ten days they packed crowds into their 5000- seat tent. Twelve years after starting their circus, Claude and Pauline Webb were now in the big time, the Los Angeles engagement the pinnacle of their success.[118]

Near the end of the performance on the evening of April 8, Russell Bros. ringmaster Norman Carroll announced that within minutes the city would be under a wartime blackout. A *Times* reporter was at the show and described the scene under the big top at Washington and Hill.

> "Then the street lights went out. There was a somber hush. The band struck up a smart tune and all of the lights in the three-ring tent went out. From the wild animal quarters came a plaintive wail from an unidentified animal. Others joined the chorus. A number of timid folks promptly left to stumble around in the inky darkness. Management promptly announced that all were welcome to stay and witness the after-show (at a slightly reduced price). Then came another piercing wail from the adjoining darkness. In the dim light of the one main spotlight, people looked around nervously. The band rose to the occasion, and so did something from an adjoining tent that sounded like a hyena. Air-raid wardens in the district went into a quick huddle, along with police, about the dull red glow outlining the main tent, then finally decided it was better to have the one subdued light than possibly hundreds of bright ones resulting from flicked-on headlights or flashlights if everyone left. The performers, the band and some of the animals made a notable effort to entertain all present. They partially succeeded. Just as everyone began to become restless, the all-clear sounded."[119]

Although Cole Bros. did not experience a black-out during its Los Angeles engagement in October of 1942, the people of California, flush with cash, packed the tents at Washington and Hill, with the circus adding extra performances. Among those performing before capacity crowds during the nine-day stand, were Hubert Castle, Jean Allen, Arky Scott, Bobby Kaye, Albert White and Juan Lobo, all under the guidance of equestrian director Harry Thomas.[120]

The following October, Cole Bros. was back at Washington and Hill for ten days. Newspapers compared the



The wartime economy brought big crowds to the Cole Bros. Circus of 1943, as evidenced by the customers who lined up at the Columbia ticket wagon to pay for their admission to the big show. Circus World Museum

circus arrival to "an invasion by Patton," and made other wartime references, such as "The fat lady has lost weight (she's rationed too)," and "The clowns' oversize footgear is worn a bit thin but aside from these wartime changes, Cole Bros. is still the same super-spectacle, there are just as many animals and the sideshows are as numerous as in days of old."[121]

Advertising for the circus also promoted the sale of War Bonds. Free reserved seats were promised for those who purchased a $25, $50, $100, $500 or $1,000 War Bond at Standard Federal Savings. "The bigger the bond the better the seat," an advertisement for the Savings and Loan promised.[122]

Despite manpower shortages and gasoline rationing, former trapeze artist Art Concello and Clyde Beatty announced in January 1944 they would be opening a new truck circus that spring on the Washington and Hill showgrounds.[123] The new Clyde Beatty-Russell Bros. Circus was a combination of the Clyde Beatty-Wallace Bros. Circus which had operated in 1943, and Russell Bros. which Concello had purchased from Claude and Pauline Webb the previous June.

For nearly the entire month of April 1944, Clyde Beatty-Russell Bros. offered performances featuring Beatty and The Flying Concellos. In addition to starring in the flying trapeze act, Antoinette also produced and performed in a web feature titled "Ballet of the Sky." Former Concello partner Jack Joyce and his wife Martha presented liberty horses and military ponies, and others on the show included Ed Raycraft, a longtime friend of the Concellos who ran the Cadillac and LaSalle automobile dealership in Bloomington, Illinois, and for the 1944 season was responsible for the front door.[124]

For 24 days, Clyde Beatty-Russell Bros. entertained

In the waning days of World War II, veteran circus manager S. L. "Buster" Cronin leased the Washington and Hill lot for his Cronin Bros. Circus, which featured a big top that was suspended from poles on the outside of the canvas. The small truck show lasted one season.

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Los Angeles on the lot at Washington and Hill. It was the longest stretch ever for any circus in Los Angeles. During the engagement the show did tremendous business, fueled in part by a multitude of local and network radio performances. Clyde Beatty appeared on the Edgar Bergen-Charlie McCarthy program on April 23, and press agent/ringmaster Norman Carroll was a guest on the Red Skelton show two days later. Despite the success of the Los Angeles engagement, the Beatty-Concello partnership ended when the show closed in 1944.

The success that Beatty-Russell experienced in the spring may have been a factor when Cole Bros. returned to Los Angeles in September, leasing the lot at Washington and Hill for 17 days. Among those on the program that season were Con Colleano, the Antalek high-perch act, the Hodgini bareback troupe and the return of long-time Cole Bros. clown Otto Griebling. As was the case the year before, an entire section of 192 reserved seats were set aside at each performance for those who purchased War Bonds.[125]

Although Cole Bros. did not tour California in 1945, the Los Angeles circus appetite was fulfilled that spring. Over a two-week period in March, three shows, Cronin Bros., Arthur Bros., and Russell Bros. Pan-Pacific, all made their debut in the Los Angeles area. First in was the motorized Cronin Bros. which opened under canvas at Washington and Hill March 24. The big top that was erected on the lot was a suspension-type tent without quarter poles.[126]

Five days later, Art Concello's new Russell Bros. Pan-Pacific Circus, featuring Frank Buck, opened its 18-day indoor run at the Pan-Pacific Auditorium. Billposters had used "Wait" paper in hopes of convincing fans to hold off on going to the circus. Francis Kitzman, boss billposter for

Very few posters remain from the Cronin Bros. Circus of 1945, possibly because billposters for the small truck circus competed for advertising space with both Art Concello's Russell Bros. Pan-Pacific Circus and the new Arthur Bros. rail show. Circus World Museum

Russell Bros., told *The Billboard* that despite the fact that Cronin had tied up many of the locations, "There are still a lot of other good hits."[127] The new Los Angeles-based Arthur Bros. Railroad Circus opened 62-miles north in Oxnard on March 26.

All three shows reportedly did big business despite unseasonable weather. Both Cronin and Russell used billboards and newspapers, along with transit advertising and radio announcements. Those listening to Los Angeles radio frequently heard both Russell and Cronin radio commercials within a few minutes of each other on the same station. The advertising apparently paid off, as big crowds were reported despite cool nights, rain and wind that dogged all three of the circuses.[128]

In April 1946, Clyde Beatty brought his new 15-car railroad circus to Washington and Hill for the first time, beginning a tradition that continued for nearly a decade. For 17 days, the circus provided twice daily performances. Although Beatty's wild animal act was clearly the main draw, another headliner was Beatty's wife Harriet who reprised an act from their first Los Angeles appearance with Cole Bros., performing with both an elephant and a tiger in the same ring. One of Beatty's big cats provided some unexpected publicity for the show when a menagerie attendant's trousers were torn off by a tiger. It was a front-page story in the city's newspapers and was picked up by several national wire services that played up the comic angle of the event.[129]

In late September 1946, Cole Bros. returned to Los Angeles after a two-year absence. The show unloading, setup and portions of the performance were memorialized in a short one-reel film distributed by Castle Films under the title "Here Comes the Circus."

According to *The Billboard,* the performance on September 27 provided Cole Bros. with the biggest opening day ever in Los Angeles. Much of the show's success was

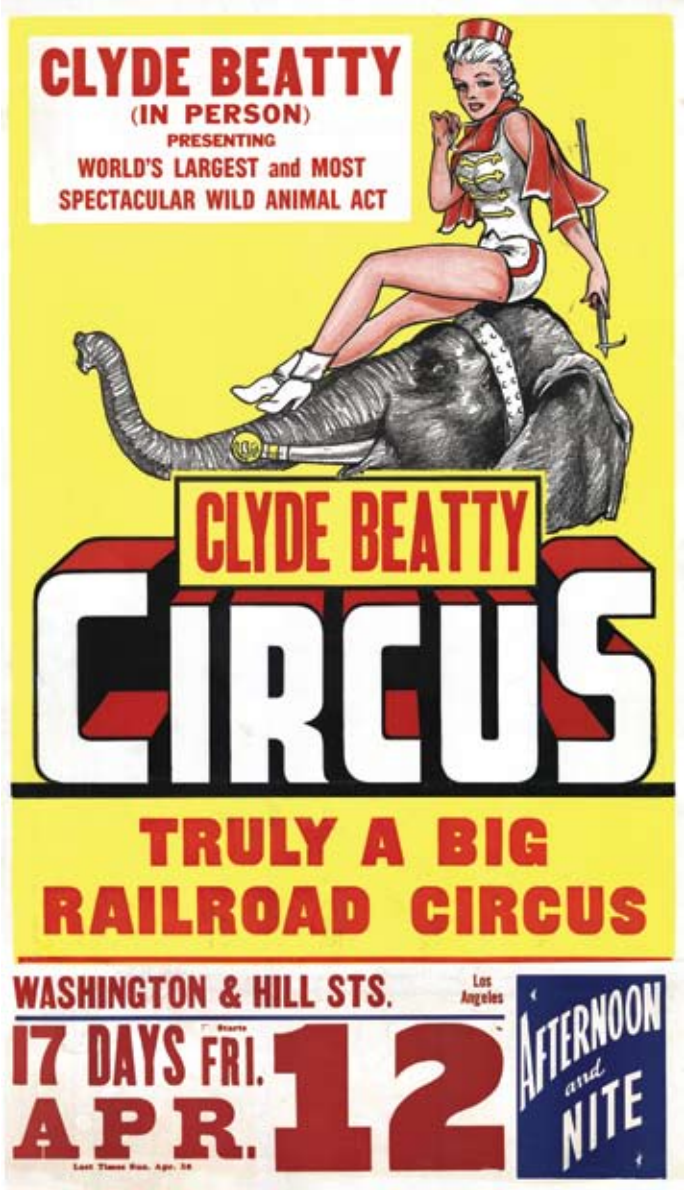
Clyde Beatty, seen here with wife Harriet in 1946, was a featured attraction for nearly 20 years at Washington and Hill. He made his first Los Angeles circus appearance with Cole Bros. in 1936 and was part of the final performance on the lot in 1955. Circus World Museum

Left, because of the proximity to Hollywood, motion picture stars and broadcasters often made appearances at the lot. In 1946, comedian Red Skelton made his way to Washington and Hill. He is seen here getting ready with members of the Clyde Beatty clown alley.

Chris Berry Collection

Below, when Clyde Beatty returned to Los Angeles in 1946, his circus was traveling on rails for the first time.

Chris Berry Collection



credited to "heavy billing, good hits in the press and one of the most extensive radio campaigns ever used by a circus."

Norman Carroll, who handled the radio bookings, lined up 17 appearances, ranging from three-minute guest spots to complete half-hour programs, on many of the major network shows including "Queen for a Day," "Truth or Consequences" and "Take It or Leave It."[130] The final Cole Bros. performance in 1946 was given nearly ten years to the day after the show first played Washington and Hill, and despite the success at the ticket wagon, it was the last time *America's Favorite Show* would visit Los Angeles.

The following spring, Clyde Beatty's circus was back on the lot, and according to the *Times* the kids who volunteered on the morning of April 1 were essential to bringing the show to life. As the neighborhood boys helped with the setup, seven-year old Georgetta McClure spoke to a reporter.

> " 'I want to go to the circus, but my mamma won't let me work. I'm a girl and she said girls don't work puttin' up the tent. Look. There's not a girl out there helping.' But circus folks, as everybody knows, have big hearts. [Willis E.] Lawson – the man in charge – heard about Georgetta and sent her two well-worn pieces of orange-colored cardboard. 'They're passes,' she beamed. 'One for me and – well – can my little sister get in on the other one?' "[131]

The long Los Angeles run again attracted both Hollywood and circus luminaries. Edgar Bergen, Errol Flynn, Red Skelton, Elizabeth Taylor, and Art Linkletter all made their way to Washington and Hill, along with bandleader

Clyde Beatty Circus set up its canvas city at Washington and Hill on the morning of April 1, 1947. The circus would spend 20 days on the lot that season.
Circus World Museum

and former circus performer, Harry James, accompanied by his wife, Betty Grable. Dozens from the circus world also visited the show in the spring of 1947, including Lalo Codona, Poodles Hanneford, Ernestine Clarke-Baer, Buster Cronin, Mabel Stark, Art Concello, Orrin Davenport and many others.[132]

Even before Clyde Beatty returned to Los Angeles the following spring, the circus was generating headlines because of issues with its grandstand bleachers. While preparing for an evening performance in nearby Alhambra, a city inspector ordered the show to shut down because of what he perceived to be a safety problem. After about a 15-minute delay, the Alhambra Police Chief overruled the inspector and gave an order that the show could continue. The inspector had said the stringers for the bleachers were not properly braced to which the police chief responded, "I've known these (circus) people a long time and they know what they are doing. They've been very cooperative and I know they wouldn't do something that would cause a hazard to the public."[133] Three days later, a 40-foot, 200-pound tent pole fell, injuring seven during a performance in Huntington Park, and later in Pasadena inspectors insisted that additional braces be added to the bleachers before they would allow the show to open.[134]

Although performances continued unimpeded, there were other issues affecting the Beatty show during its swing through Southern California. Bob Stevens, owner of Bailey Bros., was granted an injunction against Beatty in hopes of stopping the rail show from covering Stevens' posters, something that had allegedly happened in various Southern California communities.[135] Despite the legal tussle over billing, the Beatty show opened at Washington and Hill without incident.

Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey returned to Los Angeles in 1948 for the first time since the U.S. entry into World War II, and again bypassed Washington and Hill to set up at Fairfax and Wilshire, the same lot it had used in the fall of 1941. In 1949 the big show was back in Los Angeles, moving to yet another lot at Exposition and La Brea.

If Ringling-Barnum was having trouble finding a regular lot to show on in Los Angeles, the Beatty show was very consistent, returning to Washington and Hill in 1949 for its final L.A. performances of the decade. For twelve days, thousands of children and adults made the trek to Washington and Hill, but perhaps none enjoyed the show more than a group of nearly 300 hearing impaired children who were treated to a special performance on April 8.[136]

Following the matinee on Friday, April 9, the perform-

ers and working men of the Clyde Beatty Circus were captivated by the developing story of a three-and-a-half year old girl named Kathy Fiscus who had fallen into an abandoned well in the Los Angeles suburb of San Marino. Within minutes the fire department was on the scene, but they could not reach the toddler. It was the first time that live television cameras captured a major breaking news story as it developed. For 28 consecutive hours, two Los Angeles television stations reported the event live. *The Billboard* reported that the news event was so captivating that it actually turned the tide on what had started as a good stand for the Beatty show, with very small crowds attending the performances on Friday, April 9 and Saturday, April 10.[137]

The weekend foreshadowed the effect that television would have on outdoor entertainment in the coming years, as throughout the weekend not only Los Angeles, but the nation, was riveted on the rescue effort. Crowds began arriving on the scene, including some of the roustabouts from the Clyde Beatty Circus. The working men offered to go into the well but they were too large. The circus's thin man also came to the scene along with two dwarf midgets from the show, but none of them could help. Despite the intentions of the circus employees who volunteered, and the efforts of miners and other rescue workers, when the little girl was reached 14 hours later it was too late. Kathy Fiscus was dead. Those at the show grieved for her and her family, as did millions who had watched the drama unfold.[138]

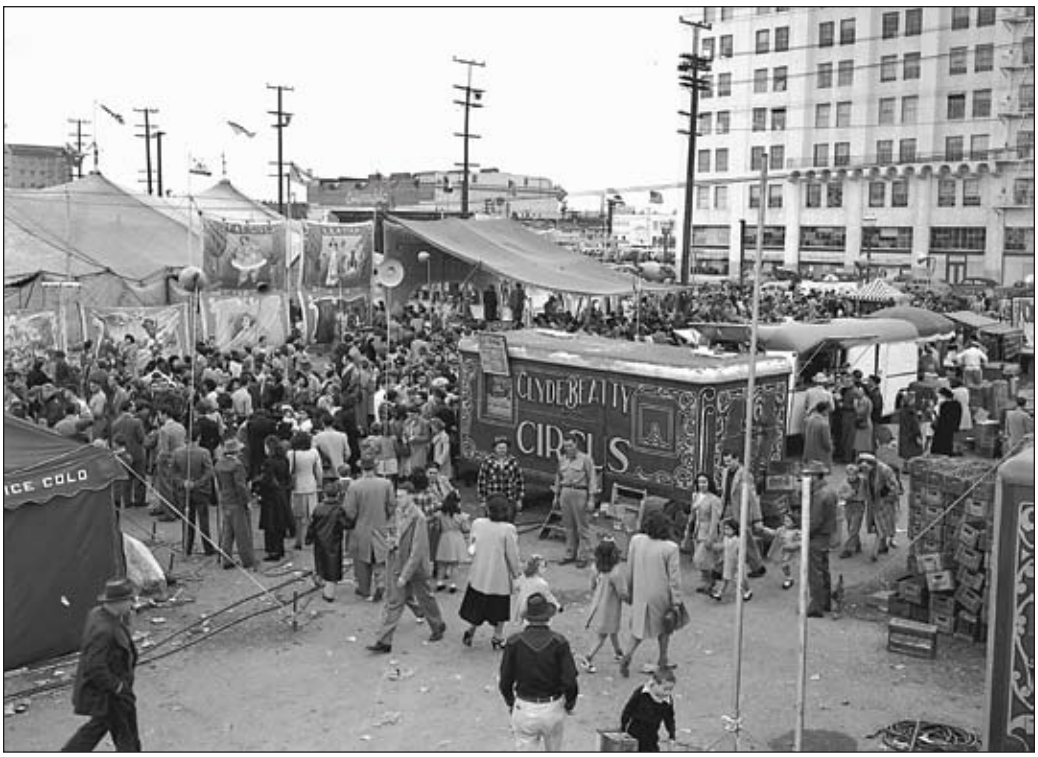
Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey arrived in West Los Angeles in late September 1949. Across town, at the corner of Washington and Hill, a different kind of tent had been erected where circuses had traditionally put up their big tops. A little-known Baptist minister had built what he called a "canvas cathedral" on the old showgrounds. The series of revival meetings were originally scheduled to last for three weeks, but 29-year old Billy Graham was so popular that for eight weeks he preached, and more than 300,000 people made the pilgrimage to the circus grounds. Graham believed it was those revivals, held in a surplus circus tent at Washington and Hill that made him a household name.[139]

The 1950s

By 1950 circuses had been using radio as a medium to reach ticket buyers for several years, and when the Beatty show arrived in Los Angeles that spring the traditional posters, heralds and couriers were supplemented by the "Clyde Beatty Show," a 30-minute radio program heard over 45 stations in six western states. The weekly program was sponsored by Dr. Ross Dog Food, and special 24-sheet billboards promoting the program, the dog food and Clyde Beatty, were posted throughout Southern California. Another tie-in with the sponsor had the Morales dog act using "Dr. Ross" pedestals in the performance.

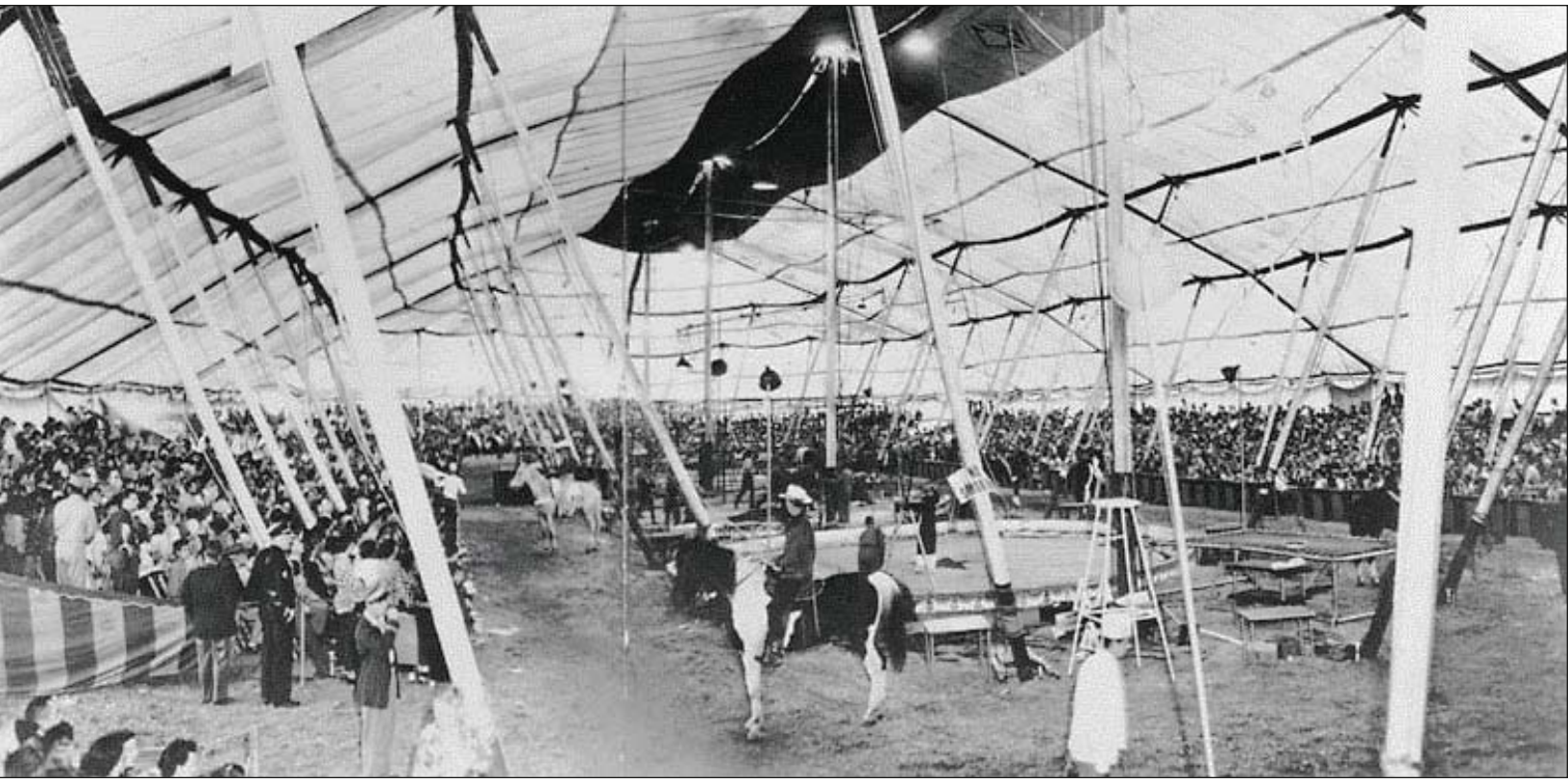
Not only radio but also television was a major part of the circus promotion in 1950. On opening day, television station KTLA broadcast live from Washington and Hill, offering glimpses of the midway, menagerie and backyard, along with interviews of performers and personnel. No actual performances were shown for the fear that viewers would think they had seen the circus and not make the trip to the showgrounds.

During the 13-day Los Angeles run more than 500 radio and television spots for the circus aired, and the show



Crowds thronged the midway before a performance of the Clyde Beatty Circus in the spring of 1948.

Circus World Museum



The Clyde Beatty Railroad Circus visited the lot at Washington and Hill starting in 1946 and was the last show to exhibit on the lot in April of 1955.
Los Angeles Public Library

was featured on 31 national programs. A special edition of "Truth or Consequences," hosted by Ralph Edwards, originated from the center ring on April 8, airing live between the matinee and evening performances, with those in the "studio" audience allowed to stay for the night show.[140]

The early 1950s were the heyday for the Clyde Beatty Circus, and when the show arrived for an eleven-day stand in 1951 it was riding a wave of publicity which now included a national radio program that aired three times a week on the Mutual Broadcasting System, plus a long national magazine feature article in *Colliers.* Despite the press coverage, turnout at the ticket wagon was lighter than in previous years. Threatening weather was a factor as was a change in the school schedule, which had students returning to their classrooms from Easter break earlier than in previous years. Ticket prices were raised ten cents across the board with General Admission seats now selling for $1.30 and Reserved Seats at $2.60.[141]

Creative sponsorships and product placement were again included in the performance in 1951, as Clyde Beatty drove a Kaiser automobile in the spec and Thoro-Fed Dog Food was promoted in the dog acts being presented by Della Ryan in Ring One and former equestrienne star Dorothy Herbert in Ring Three.[142]

Not all of Clyde Beatty's publicity resulted from his performance in the circus ring as newspapers reported the premature birth of his son, Clyde Raymond Beatty II on January 15, 1952. Despite the fact the infant was only four-pounds, six ounces, both mother and child were reported to be in good condition. Jane Beatty's (Clyde had remarried after Harriet had died in 1950) physician said the premature birth was probably due to a fall that she had experienced a few days earlier.[143]

From the time he first headlined on Hagenbeck-Wallace in the 1930s, posters had proclaimed "Captain Beatty" as "The Greatest Wild Animal Trainer of All Time – In a Single Handed Combat with 40 Man-eating Lions and Royal Bengal Tigers." Yet in an interview with the *Times* prior to the opening of the 1952 season at Washington and Hill, Beatty told the reporter that he would be in the cage with 25 lions and tigers that season, pointing out that this was the largest number that he had ever worked in a single cage.[144] Whether the reporter misquoted Beatty or not, the fact that he had more than two-dozen cats in the cage that season is remarkable.

As the show opened its 17-day run in 1952, publicity

was centered not only on the 25 lions and tigers, but also the fact that the circus featured nearly all new equipment, including a new big top, along with costumes for "36 ballet girls."[145]

For the 1953 season the Beatty show coordinated its calendar with the Los Angeles School District to make sure that the engagement at Washington and Hill would coincide with the student's Easter break. When the show arrived on the lot that spring, the midway layout was flipped. In previous seasons the sideshow tent had been spotted on the right side of the midway looking toward the big top, but this season the tents were set up on the left side with the white ticket wagon in the center of the midway rather than to the left. The sideshow featured a new attraction, conjoined twins Yvonne & Yvette, who were a big attraction on the midway that season.

In his review for *The Billboard,* Sam Abbott gave a candid assessment of the show. While he praised the fresh canvas and paint, he also pointed out that some features, though not flawless, would be "expected to smooth out." He praised Beatty's showmanship along with the addition of steel chutes which allowed the audience to better see the lions and tigers as they entered the area for the wild animal act. Abbott also was enthusiastic about the Wallenda high-wire performance, the final feature before the Grand Finale.[146]

The Beatty show spent six weeks touring the Los Angeles metropolitan area in 1953, and billposters managed by Glenn Booth, put up about 20-percent more paper than in previous years. Radio and television coverage was again heavy and a driving force for a promotional effort coordinated by Jack Knight along with Shirley and Norman Carroll. In addition to nine feature stories in the daily newspapers, KTLA again returned to the lot for a live television broadcast.[147]

Beatty was back on the silver screen in 1954, along with Mickey Spillane and Pat O'Brien in the thriller *Ring of Fear*, the entire show having been shuttled to Phoenix in late December 1953 for filming. Before beginning the 1954 tour in March, the circus train returned to Arizona's capital, where the show was used as a backdrop for the Dean Martin and Jerry Lewis comedy, *Three Ring Circus.*[148]

Because of Hollywood's interest in the show that season, it should come as no surprise that the 1954 opener was produced with the fanfare of a Hollywood premiere. The weather was clear for the star-studded event that was produced in association with the Warner Bros. publicity department. Some 300 celebrities were on hand for the show that night, as searchlights scanned the skies above Washington and Hill and KTLA again broadcast live from the showgrounds.[149]

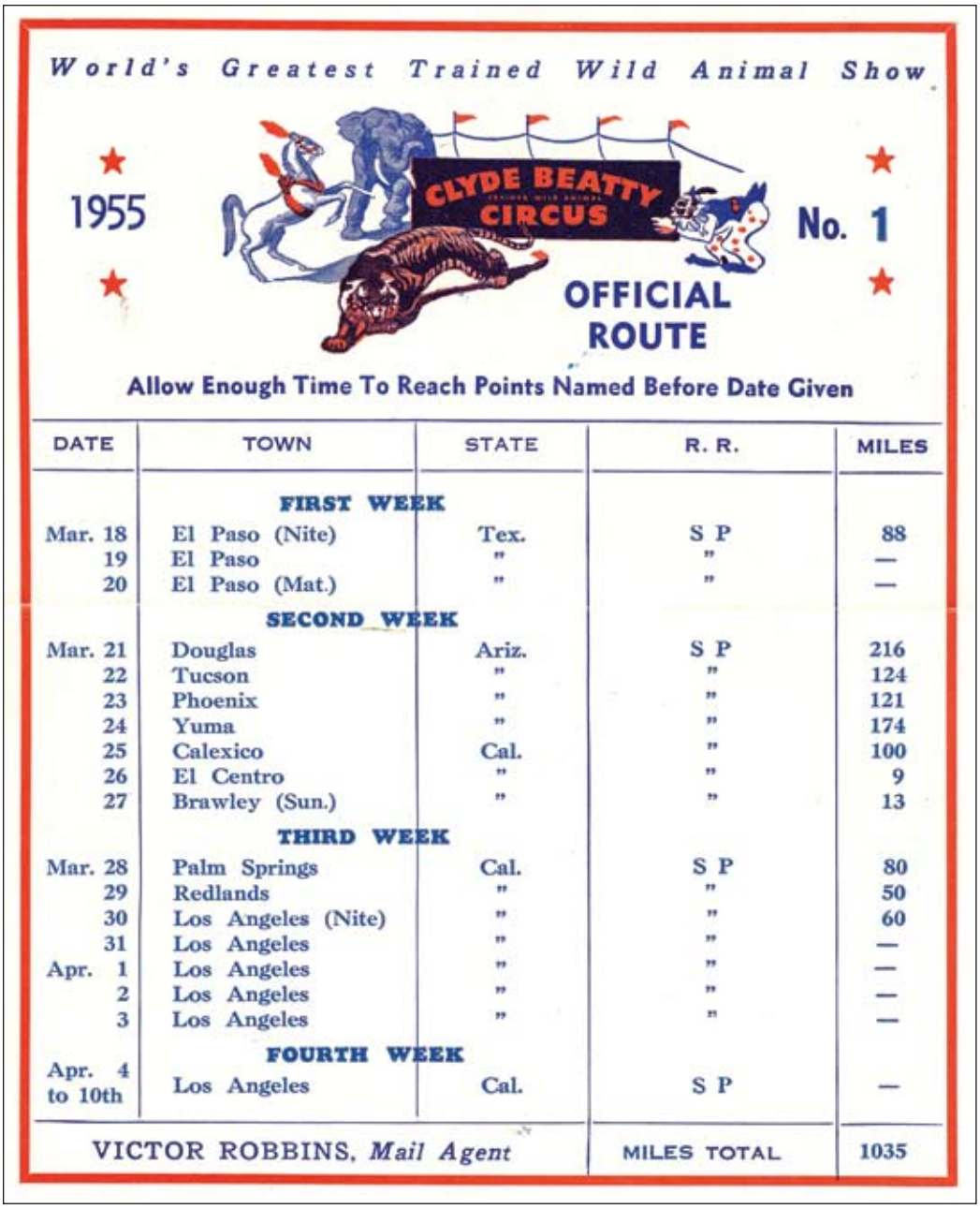
According to Beatty's General Manager Frank Orman, the warm days and clear skies put ticket sales "well ahead" of 1953, though he would not venture to estimate by how much. Business was believed to be better in part because of an increase in both the advertising budget and the assistance of the Hollywood press agents. Sideshow manager Harry Golub said that his business was a surprise with attendance up about 20-percent from 1953.[150]

Although they did not actually "day and date" each other, Beatty and Polack Bros. battled in Los Angeles during the spring of 1954. Beatty was first in, opening at Washington and Hill on April 8. The Beatty show completed its eleven-day stand and 24 hours later Polack's "Western Unit" opened a seven-day indoor run at the Shrine Auditorium. Despite the competition, Polack did not use "Wait" paper. Parley Baer handled promotion for the Polack show that encouraged the public to see a circus "the modern way, enjoying our comfortable indoor seats."[151]

Even before the Clyde Beatty Circus left its Deming, New Mexico winter quarters in 1955, word was filtering out that the performances in Los Angeles would be the last ever at Washington and Hill. In the seven decades that circuses had been visiting that lot, the greatest performers in American circus history had made a pilgrimage to the old showgrounds. Some of those greats returned to the lot in 1955 in a performance that featured Clyde Beatty, Hugo Zacchini, the George Hanneford family and juggler Massimiliano Truzzi. Tommy Hanneford was the announcer for the show and Victor Robbins led the eleven-piece circus band.[152]

On the morning of March 30, 1955, television station KTTV had three remote crews ready before dawn, showing all facets of the intricate process of building the canvas city. For four hours, television viewers watched the show come to life, with one of the cameras providing a bird's eye view from the Mode O'Day building across the street from the lot.[153] Although the television station had been licensed only nine years earlier, the Clyde Beatty Circus broadcast was the 2,500th live remote in less than a decade.[154]

The first circuses to arrive in Los Angeles had little competition from other media, and the concept of being able to watch an artist perform an act from 2,000 miles away would have been inconceivable to Ben Wallace, James A. Bailey or the Ringling brothers. When Barnum & Bailey had arrived in 1905, the Los Angeles audience was so en-



World's Greatest Trained Wild Animal Show

1955

CLYDE BEATTY CIRCUS

No. 1

OFFICIAL ROUTE

Allow Enough Time To Reach Points Named Before Date Given

DATE	TOWN	STATE	R. R.	MILES
	FIRST WEEK			
Mar. 18	El Paso (Nite)	Tex.	S P	88
19	El Paso	"	"	—
20	El Paso (Mat.)	"	"	—
	SECOND WEEK			
Mar. 21	Douglas	Ariz.	S P	216
22	Tucson	"	"	124
23	Phoenix	"	"	121
24	Yuma	"	"	174
25	Calexico	Cal.	"	100
26	El Centro	"	"	9
27	Brawley (Sun.)	"	"	13
	THIRD WEEK			
Mar. 28	Palm Springs	Cal.	S P	80
29	Redlands	"	"	50
30	Los Angeles (Nite)	"	"	60
31	Los Angeles	"	"	—
Apr. 1	Los Angeles	"	"	—
2	Los Angeles	"	"	—
3	Los Angeles	"	"	—
	FOURTH WEEK			
Apr. 4 to 10th	Los Angeles	Cal.	S P	—
VICTOR ROBBINS, *Mail Agent*			MILES TOTAL	1035

After two weeks on the road, the new Clyde Beatty Circus of 1955 arrived in Los Angeles on March 30. It would be the last time a circus set up on the lot at Washington and Hill.

Circus World Museum

thusiastic that they lined up for hours to buy tickets, such were the limited entertainment options.

In the decades that passed the circus began competing with early motion pictures, followed by radio and in the 1950s television. Circus acts and other world class entertainment could now be seen in the comfort of your own living room, the only price of admission was a payment plan on the latest television manufactured by Motorola, RCA or Magnavox.

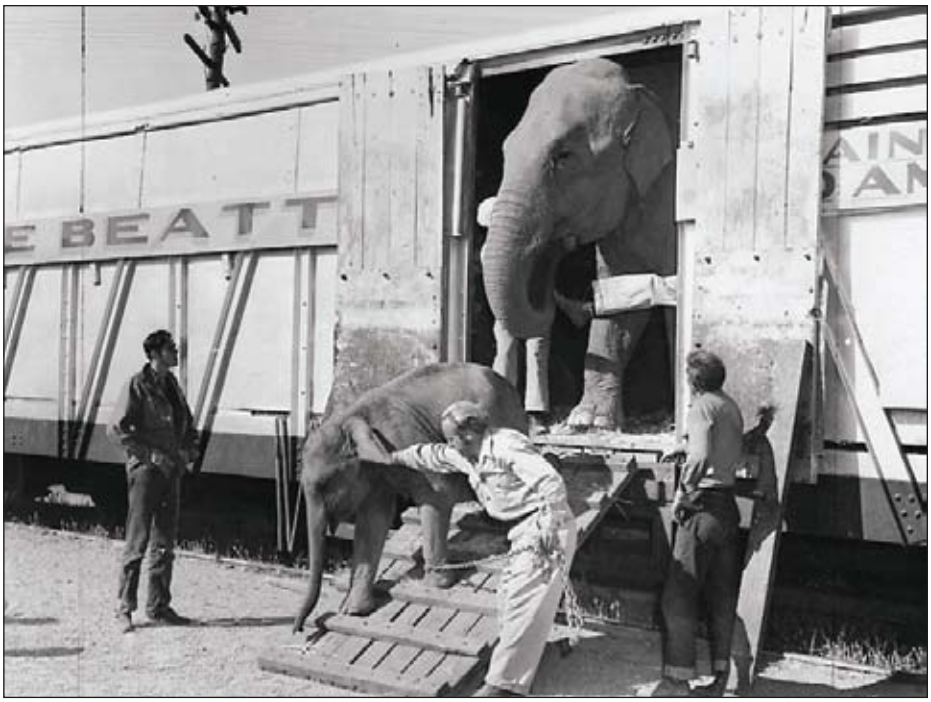
For the circus pioneers who first traveled to the West Coast in the late 19th century, the concept of a metropolitan area with a population of 13,000,000 people was unfathomable. Likewise, those who unloaded the Percheron and Belgian horses from a Ringling Bros. stock car for the Los Angeles performances of 1900 could never comprehend the Corvettes and Cadillacs that today jam the Santa Monica freeway only two blocks from where parade wagons rolled off of flat cars more than a century ago.

Cities grow. Styles change. Entertainment evolves.

If you should find yourself today on Washington Boulevard approaching Hill Street, you would see a corner that is remarkably unremarkable. A light rail line runs down the center of the street in a low-income neighborhood where strip malls have mostly replaced vacant lots, and where residential housing was long ago gobbled up by urban renewal.

The Mode O'Day building still stands, looking much as it did 90 years ago, only now a Subway sandwich shop occupies the ground floor. Across Hill Street, where Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey once set up their menagerie and sideshow, McDonald's now serves Egg McMuffins and Quarter Pounders, and the non-descript Los Angeles Furniture Mart, known today as "The Reef," is now a mixed-use complex of offices, studios and retail that towers over a plot of land that was once a temporary home for the most magnificent and daring performers in the world.

In the second half of the 20th century, circuses continued to visit Los Angeles and new generations of fans



The Clyde Beatty Circus unloaded for the last time in Los Angeles on March 30, 1955. It was the final time the train was spotted at the Santa Fe rail yards near the corner of 14th and Santa Fe Streets, not far from downtown Los Angeles.

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embraced a new generation of animal trainers, aerialists and clowns who now performed in state-of-the-art arenas such as the Forum, the Sports Arena and the Staples Center. Despite the similarities, these indoor circuses must have lost some of the magic that unfolded on a cool autumn morning a century ago when baggage wagons, roustabouts and local residents all crowded onto a vacant lot, eager to embrace a captivating world of sawdust, spangles and exotic smells.

On Easter Sunday 1955, the last circus wagon rolled away from an enchanted corner of America, and as the Clyde Beatty Circus departed the lot that night, something else left with it. It was the spirit of the thousands who made a brief appearance on that corner, only to fold their tents and silently slip away for another year. All that remained was the memory of their performances and the joy and excitement that they brought to an audience that numbered more than two-million over 60 years.

There will never be another circus at the corner of Washington and Hill, yet the spirit of those who passed that way so long ago is close at hand every time a triple-somersault is caught, a tiger enters a cage, or a wire walker thrills the audience below. These are the ghosts of that most illustrious of showgrounds. You cannot see them and you cannot hear them, but the accomplishments of these men and women live in every circus that has followed and in every performance yet to come. That is the legacy of Washington and Hill. BW

Acknowledgements

"There Used to Be a Circus Here: *The Ghosts of Washington and Hill*" could not have been written without the assistance of Maureen Brunsdale, Fred Dahlinger, Greg Parkinson, Fred Pfening III, Jennifer Lemmer Posey, Dave Price, Mark Schmitt, Pete Shrake and Tim Tegge.

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about the author...

As Senior Vice President at iHeartMedia, Chris Berry oversees the radio giant's national news operations and manages NBC News Radio. Chris previously held executive positions at ABC and CBS in Washington DC, New York, Chicago and Los Angeles, where eight years ago he began researching the historic showgrounds at Washington and Hill. He is a resident of Scottsdale, Arizona and a regular contributor to Bandwagon.

The setup of the Clyde Beatty Circus in 1955 was broadcast live to Los Angeles television viewers.

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Canvasmen of the Clyde Beatty Circus were photographed during the final setup at Washington and Hill.

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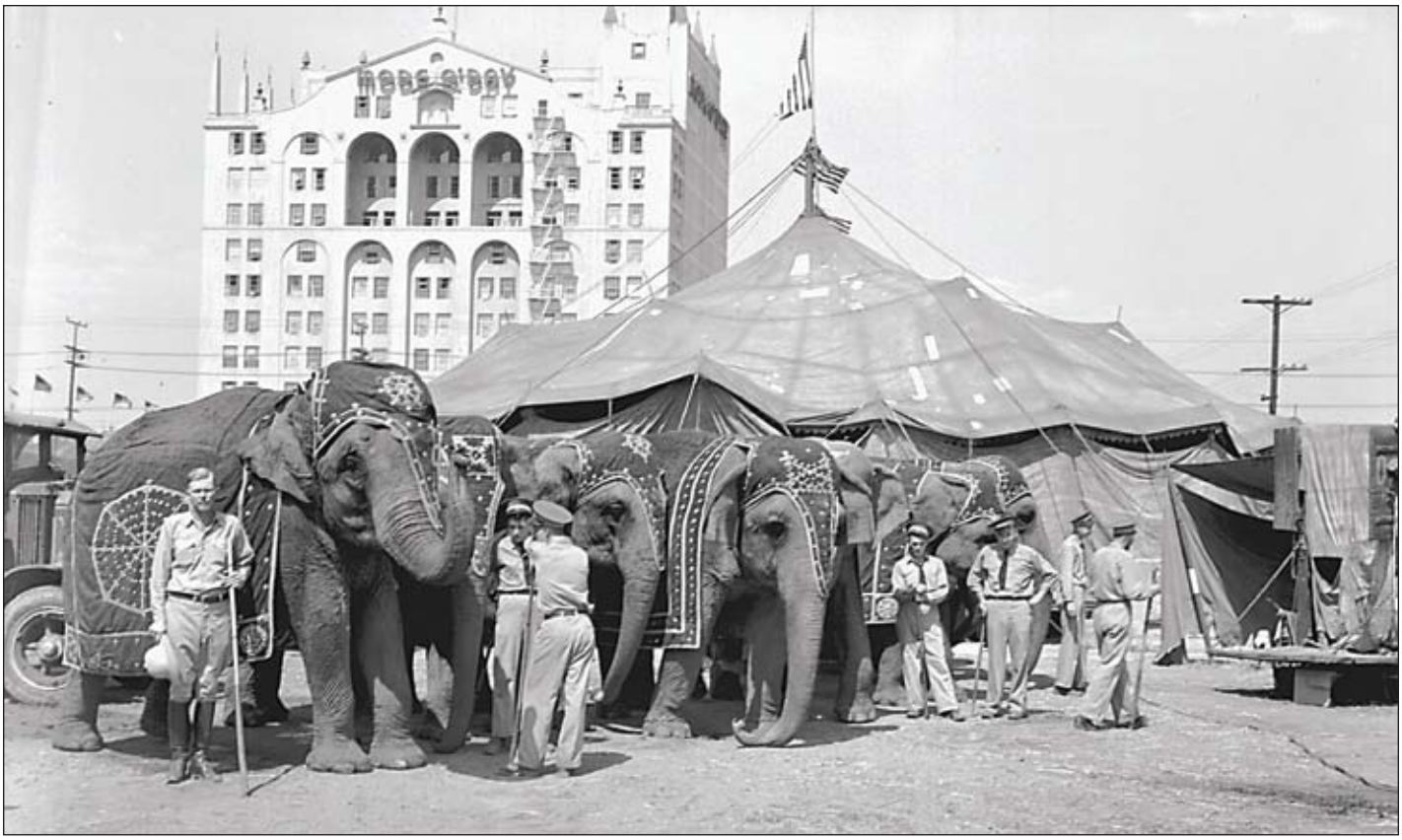

"The Caliph of Baghdad" was the Cole Bros. spec in 1944. Elephant superintendent Eugene "Arky" Scott is seen here with his men prior to entering the big top.

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When the Clyde Beatty railroad circus appeared in Los Angeles in 1947, it used poster art created a decade earlier for the Cole Bros. Circus, reworked to reflect the name of his new show. Chris Berry Collection

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Victor Robbins, seen here at the far right with the 1947 Clyde Beatty band, also led the Sells-Floto and Cole Bros. bands during performances at Washington and Hill. Circus World Museum

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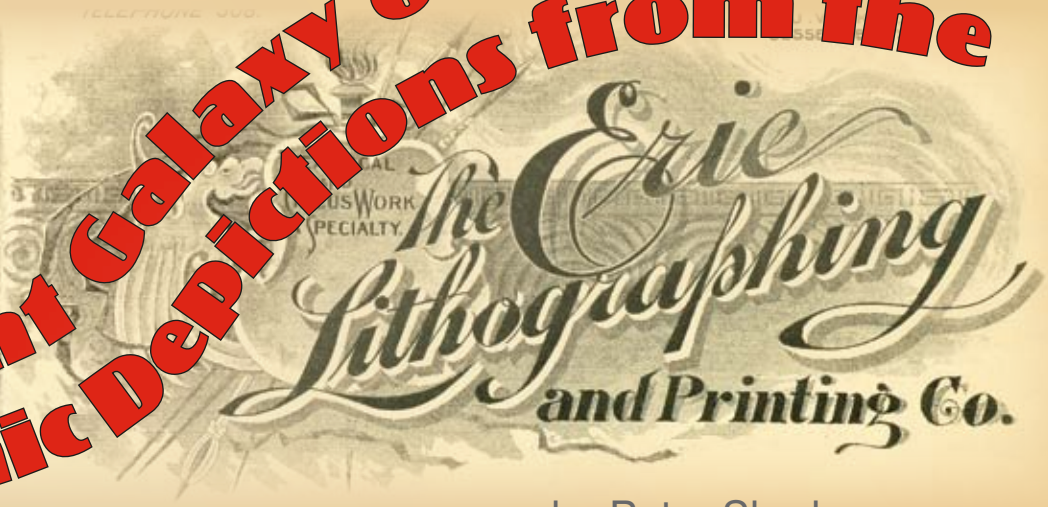
The Cole Bros. Circus made its first appearance at Washington and Hill in 1936 and returned nearly every season, including during World War II. This poster was used for the last appearance in Los Angeles in the fall of 1946. Chris Berry Collection

A Giant Galaxy of Gorgeous Graphic Depictions from the



by Peter Shrake

artwork from Circus World Museum's Robert L. Parkinson Library & Research Center

Circus posters were never intended to survive forever and were usually abandoned once the show was over, or they were left to fade and deteriorate with the weather. As fleeting as their existence was, their creation was the result of a painstaking effort by countless artists who labored to bring color and vitality to circus advertising. This artistic process is evident in the collection of original poster art found at Circus World Museum's Robert L. Parkinson Library and Research Center. The repository holds an extensive collection of more than 348 paintings and sketches that culminated in the magnificent circus posters that are preserved today in Baraboo as well as in many other collections across the country. The bulk of this collection consists of artwork produced by the Enquirer Printing Co., but it also contains examples created by the Central Show Printing Co., Erie Lithographic and Printing Co., and at least one painting created by the Strobridge Printing Co.

Approximately 200 of these paintings and drawings, including all of those shown in this article, were acquired by the museum in the late 1960s from the collection of Lee Allen Estes of Lexington, Kentucky. As a lieutenant in the Kentucky State Police, Estes had developed an elaborate and highly successful fire, bicycle and general safety program for school children. His 90-minute shows employed everything from ventriloquism to stunts and magic. Magic was a longtime passion for Estes whose skills were at such a level that he once carried an insurance policy of $5,000 just to cover his hands.[1] Magic was also at the origin of his private passion – collecting circus ephemera. Originally Estes was simply looking for images of circus magicians, but over time his interest expanded resulting in a massive collection of over 2,200 circus and theatrical posters, original poster art, numerous artifacts, and several small wagons.[2]

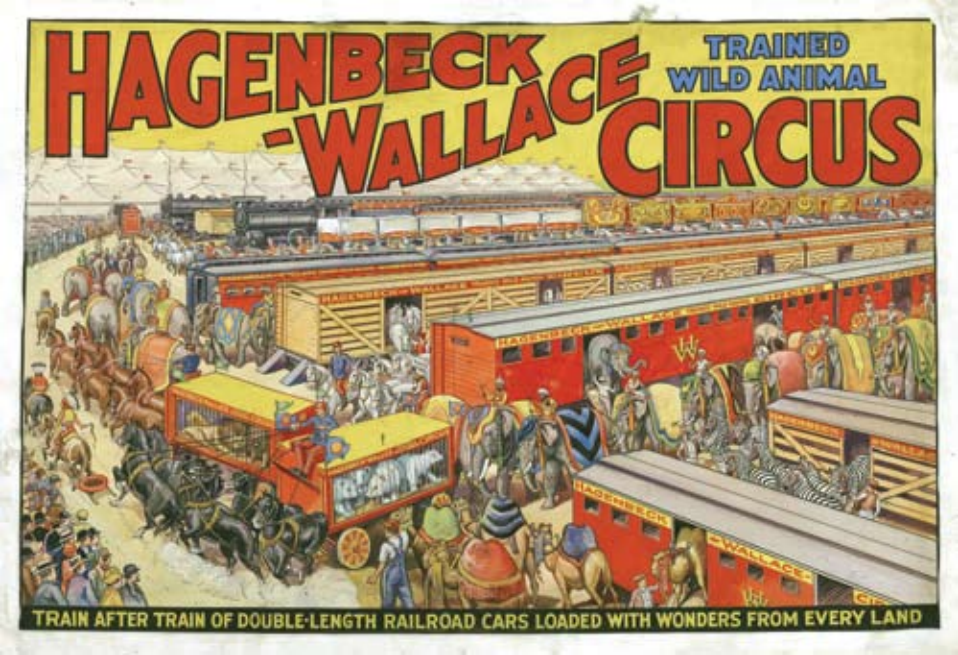
Estes' collection eventually caught the attention of Circus World Museum Director C. P. "Chappie" Fox, who after seven years of corresponding with the Estes, successfully brokered a deal in 1967 to have the collection purchased by the Jos. Schlitz Brewing Company. Schlitz President Robert Uihlein was a prominent supporter of the museum and the Old Milwaukee Days Circus Parade. Uihlein was proud of the purchase, announcing to his employees the acquisition of a "Gigantic galaxy of gorgeous, graphic depictions of the marvelous, monumental magnificence and peerless pageantry of countless colossal canvassed circuses that mesmerized millions."[3] For five years the company kept the collection at the museum on loan until it was formally donated in 1972.

The 18 paintings accompanying this article were created by artists at the Erie Lithograph Printing Co. of Erie, Pennsylvania. Much of the company's history revolves around the career of F. J. Walker. In 1888, he partnered with E. S. Gallagher to form the job printing shop of Walker and Gallagher, producing a variety of office related paper goods including stationary, invoice and voucher forms, labels,

A large assortment of wild animals surrounds a female trainer as her co-presenter stands in the background of this nine sheet poster design created by Erie Lithograph Company in the early 20th century. The measurements of the original are 25¾ x 17".

This Erie design stirred the imaginations of young and old alike in 1934. Hagenbeck-Wallace was one of the five railroad shows of the former American Circus Corporation that John Ringling bought in 1929. The circus permanently ceased operations after the dreadful season of 1938. The dimensions are 28 x 19¼".

receipts, handbills and notices, coupons, tickets, and timetables. Within a year Gallagher left the partnership. Now on his own, Walker expanded the business to focus on various show enterprises such as theatre, vaudeville, and circus printing under the trademark Walker Show Print. It was a good move, and soon there was enough business to warrant the construction of a $4,000 brick building to house both the office and the workshop.[4] Between 1890 and 1894 the firm printed materials using several trademarks including Erie Show Printing Co. and Erie Print. With nearly 200 employees on the rolls and a thriving business, Walker needed help. In 1895 he took on Jessie Roberts as a partner and changed the company title to Walker & Roberts.



Erie Litho. Co. printed posters for Sparks Circus in 1925 based on this stock design. The artwork is essentially square, but notations indicate it was intended for both one sheet and six sheet posters. The original measures 17 x 17¼".

In the early years the company primarily printed stock posters, allowing it to offer lower prices than many of its competitors. By 1915 the company advertised 75 samples of stock poster imagery to its customers in addition to specialty printing upon request.[5] Walker had informed a customer in 1899, "We enclose you a list of circus paper and will be pleased to have your orders at 3 [cents] per sheet." But Walker was also expanding his business, boasting to a customer the company could produce, "any class of paper you may want, lithographed, engraved, or letter press."[6] Walker's note regarding lithographed paper referred to the recent addition of a lithographing department in 1894. The company could produce original poster imagery on its own. The significant expansion in capability also prompted a name change. In 1895 the company became known as the Erie Lithograph & Printing Co.

In 1899 Jessie Roberts retired, leaving Walker as the sole business owner.[7] By that time, the company was well established in the circus poster trade. By 1890, Erie was printing materials for the Walter L. Main Circus, a business association that would last at least until the late 1930s. Other early customers included Hunting's Circus and the Great Wallace Shows.

In the early years of the 20th century, business remained profitable. New employees were added and in 1901 Walker purchased the Correspondent Show Printing Company of Piqua, Ohio, moving its equipment to Erie.[8] In the same year, Walker corresponded with Charles Ringling, hoping to secure a contract to print one million 16-page booklets with a four color cover.[9] It is unknown if the Ringling contract was ever approved, but between 1900 and 1915 the company was producing paper for a number of oth-

Clyde Beatty's wild animal act received top billing on Cole Bros. Circus when he joined the show in 1935. Erie produced several posters for the newly created outfit. One of these depicted Beatty surrounded by 40 snarling lions and tigers. In contrast, the vivid design seen here caught the eye with just one monstrous male lion twisting in midair to lunge at the famed trainer. The single tiger in the lower left is almost incidental. Clyde Beatty (1903-1965) had a long career in the steel-bound arena, one that spanned four decades. He left home in 1921 and joined Howes Great London Circus as a cage boy. He rapidly became one of the most legendary "fighting style" wild animal trainers in circus history. The dimensions are 15½ x 22¼".

er shows including the Welsh Bros. Circus, Gentry Bros., Sun Bros., Gollmar Bros., Yankee Robinson, Robinson's Famous Shows, Frank A. Robbins Circus, Sparks Circus, Tompkins Wild West, Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus, LaTena's Circus, Rentz Bros. Circus, Stone & Murray's Circus, J. H. Eschman Circus, Mighty Haag Shows, and Cole Bros. Circus. The various proprietors of circuses bearing the Cole Bros. title were customers until at least 1937.[10]

The company also had its share of bumps. In 1902, a fire at the factory caused somewhere between $60,000 and $100,000 in damages. Regardless of the actual amount of the loss, Walker was quoted in the local papers that the damage would not affect business.[11] The next year the company was ordered to appear in court to justify the printing of a poster for a play titled *A Break for Liberty,* a jail-break story.

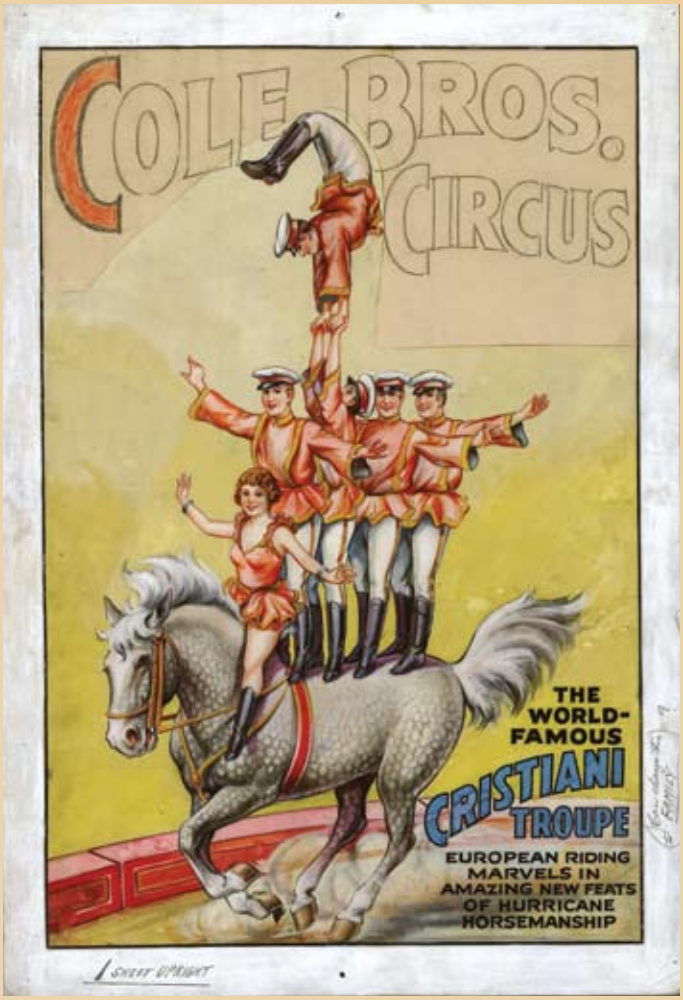
The partially completed lettering on this piece suggests that it was first offered to The Mighty Haag Shows. However, the placement of the lettering would have made it possible to sell to other circuses as well. Notations in the upper margin indicate that the artwork could be adapted for both three sheet and eight sheet formats. The dimensions are 16 x 21¼."

This realistic depiction of the Marcellus Troupe provided an unusual composition for the time-period. The act included a number of posed tableaux heralded here as "Amazingly Beautiful Living Art Creations in Bronze." The design which could be used for half, one and eight sheet posters, measures 17¼ x 23½".

A complaint had been filed against the company regarding a particularly "blood-curling, hair-raising lithograph" depicting an outdoor wintery scene with a lone woman in a shootout with several men.[12]

Three years later, in 1906, the company was again in court, this time as an unsuccessful defendant in a trademark infringement suit. Apparently, there was another Erie Printing Company, also located in Erie, Pennsylvania, that took issue with Walker using identical words in its company's name. The court determined that neither entity had exclusive right to the use of the terms "Erie" or "Printing" but ordered Walker to not use the specific title Erie Printing Co. on its products and for him to pay all court related expenses.[13]

In 1907, the Erie Lithograph Company and the Walker Show Print, which employed non-union employees, en-



Beneath the outlining of the Cole Bros. Circus lettering applied at the top of this artwork is painted lettering for Al G. Barnes – Sells-Floto. The Cristiani bareback riders arrived in America and joined Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey in 1934. Erie created this artwork c.1937, and it was first used with the Ringling-Barnum title. When Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey closed mid-season in 1938, the Cristianis were among the acts that were added to the Barnes-Sells-Floto enterprise. Thus the artwork was updated with that title. When the Cristianis subsequently signed on with Cole Bros., Erie attempted to recycle the old design advertising their act. This artwork measures 16 x 23½".

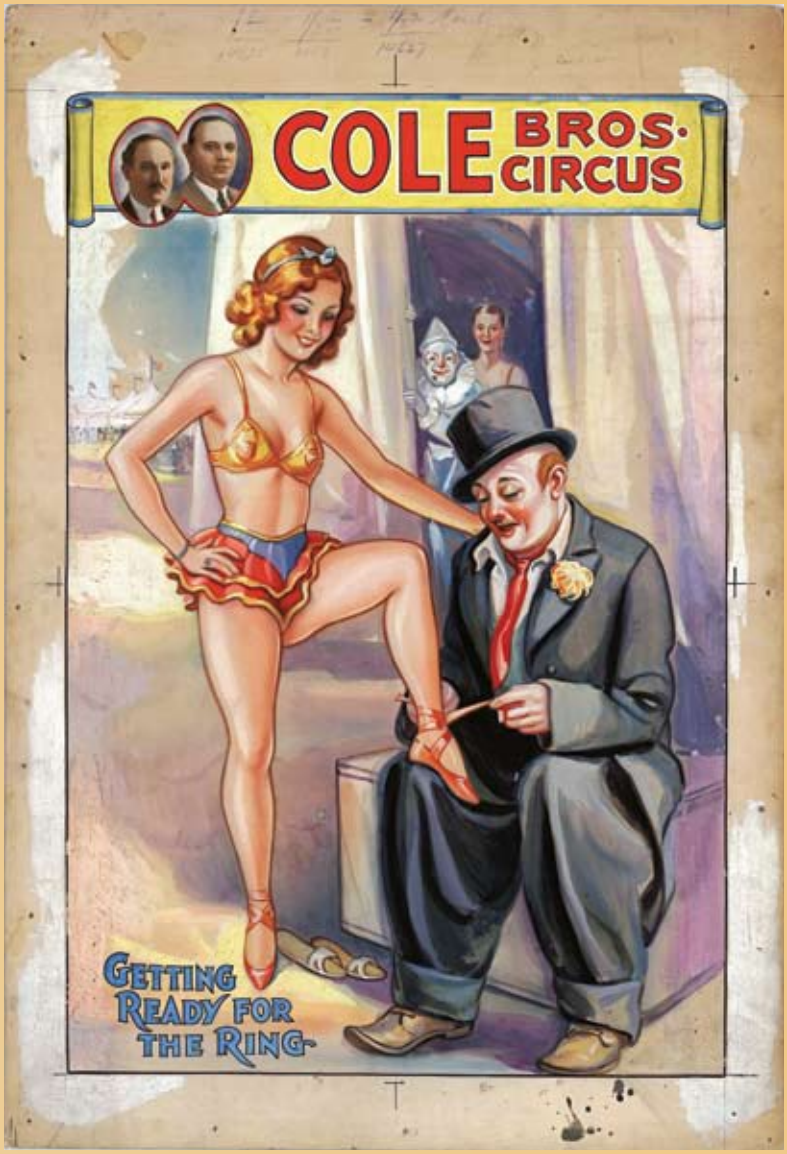
countered trouble with the International Typographical Union. The union had discovered that the Cole Bros. Circus distributed non-union Erie Litho. paper in advance of a show in Oneida, New York. The union called on all local members in the region to boycott the circus, which affected attendance enough to compel the show to sign a pledge to only use union labeled printing. The union initiated a similar action against the Frank A. Robbins Circus in Pennsylvania the same month. The loss of business must have been enough to get the attention of the printers because within six months the Typographical Union proudly boasted that the company had been "brought back into the fold."[14]

These troubles were relatively small, however, and in 1905 the company was enough of a success to garner the interest of a new printing conglomeration titled the Consolidated Printing Co. This new entity was a merger of seven of the largest show printing companies in the U.S. including Donaldson, Courier, Metropolitan Litho. Co. and Erie Litho. By the end of 1909, the massive corporation, which by then also included the Russell-Morgan Litho. Co. and J. Ottoman Litho. Co., reorganized under the name United States Lithograph Co. and became a significant competitor to industry leader Strobridge.[15]

In 1913, the lithography department at Erie and all its associated artists were relocated to Norwood, Ohio, near Cincinnati, where it was combined with the litho-

Erie created this poster design c.1930. Its depiction of tigers riding the backs of a pair of Asian elephants running in stride may have been the fancy of the artist who brushed the scene, rather than the representation of an actual act. The dimensions are 12 x 16¼".

Above, This special artwork was completed by Erie employees for Robbins Bros. Circus in 1925. The "Spirit of '76" was the theme of the show's spec that season. Presidents Washington and Lincoln look on, but they needed no introduction at the time, as portraits of both presidents hung in most elementary school rooms throughout the country's 48 states. Measuring 32 x 14", this uncommon shape was designed for a 15 sheet poster.



Right, The inspiration for the clown seen here was Otto Griebling (1896-1972), although he is not acknowledged by name in the artwork. Griebling joined Cole Bros. Circus in 1935 and remained with the show through the 1950 season. Thereafter, he toured with Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey. The identity of the female performer who is depicted as "Getting Ready for the Ring" is unknown. This creative Erie design was printed as a poster that became a favorite of many circus collectors. The measurements are 19 x 27¾".

graph departments of the other companies of the United States Litho. Co. Most, if not all of the artwork examples shown here were likely painted by artists working out of Norwood. The actual printing remained in Erie.[16] Unfortunately, not much is known about the men who created these striking images though, many of them were possibly created by Verne Meyer, Joseph Hornick and Joe Schermerle, artists who were working for the company at that time.[17] The paintings seen here represent but a single stage of their work. The process began with a sketch which was often reworked and revised. From the sketches, black and white paintings were prepared to establish dark and light shading. Finally a color painting, often done in watercolor but sometimes in oil, was produced. From this painting another team of artists would transfer the image to flat stones or metal plates for printing.

By the mid-1920s, the Erie Litho. Co trademark could be found on posters distributed by all of circuses of the American Circus Corporation, as well as Christy Bros., Cooper Bros., Franko Bros., Downie Bros. and Mighty Haag Shows. From 1928 until at least 1940 the company

This was obviously not a stock design. "The Thriller Supreme" act was introduced to American audiences in 1931 by several Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey posters created by Erie Lithograph Company. This watercolor, measuring 24¼ x 21", was used to design 12 sheet posters.

was also printing for Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus.[18]

The Erie Lithograph & Printing Co. continued to produce show paper through the 1940s, but by the early 1950s the company phased out its production of circus materials. Nevertheless, artwork bearing the Erie trademark could be found in printings by other companies such as Central Show Print as late as 1959. The United States Lithograph Co. was acquired by Diamond International, and by 1966 the Erie plant had switched to printing labels for soaps, cigarettes, and soup cans.[19]

The factory F. J. Walker built, which once took up an entire block between 10 and 22 W. 4th St. in Erie, no longer stands. The laborers who prepared these works of art are long forgotten. But fragments of their work remain, preserved for posterity in public collections at the John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art, the Special Collections Department at the Milner Library, in private collections, and at the Robert L. Parkinson Library and Research Center at Circus World Museum. BW

A montage of Japanese foot jugglers, aerialists, wire walkers, hand balancers, and other acrobats virtually fill all of the space of this almost square design prepared by Erie. It was intended to be printed as a 12 sheet poster. The original is 22¾ x 21".

Viewing a six sheet poster that was based on this artwork might have led to the conclusion that there was no limit to a sea lion's balance and musical aptitude. Most notable is the sea lion in the foreground that is perched on a large ball while steadying an illuminated lamp on its snout. Also of note is the preposterous sea lion duo on the horse at left. The measurements of the original painting are 18¼ x 18".

This watercolor was sized for a 16 sheet poster. The artist was certainly skilled in the placement and contrasting of pastel colors. Note that the painting overlays two basic scenes. In the foreground, twelve acrobats are performing various feats on a stage, as a clown dressed in black looks on mysteriously. In the background, equestrians can be seen standing astride palomino horses that gallop around a ring. Each male rider is posing with a young lady in a bareback carrying act. The dimensions are 15¼ 22½".

Above, this rather bizarre picture illustrates an assortment of clown walk-around gags, both traditional and ones that were highly unusual. It was created c.1931 for use as a 12 sheet poster. The artwork is 21¼ wide and 11" in height.

Below, in this painted scene, a discerning eye will detect an unrealistic representation of the Sparks Circus street parade – the advance of side-by-side parading units from the foreground to the distant horse-drawn wagons and blanketed elephants. This approach, however, filled the space with brilliant colors and allowed for the resulting six sheet posters to portray a sense of wonder and excitement. The dimensions are 24¾ x 12".

about the author...

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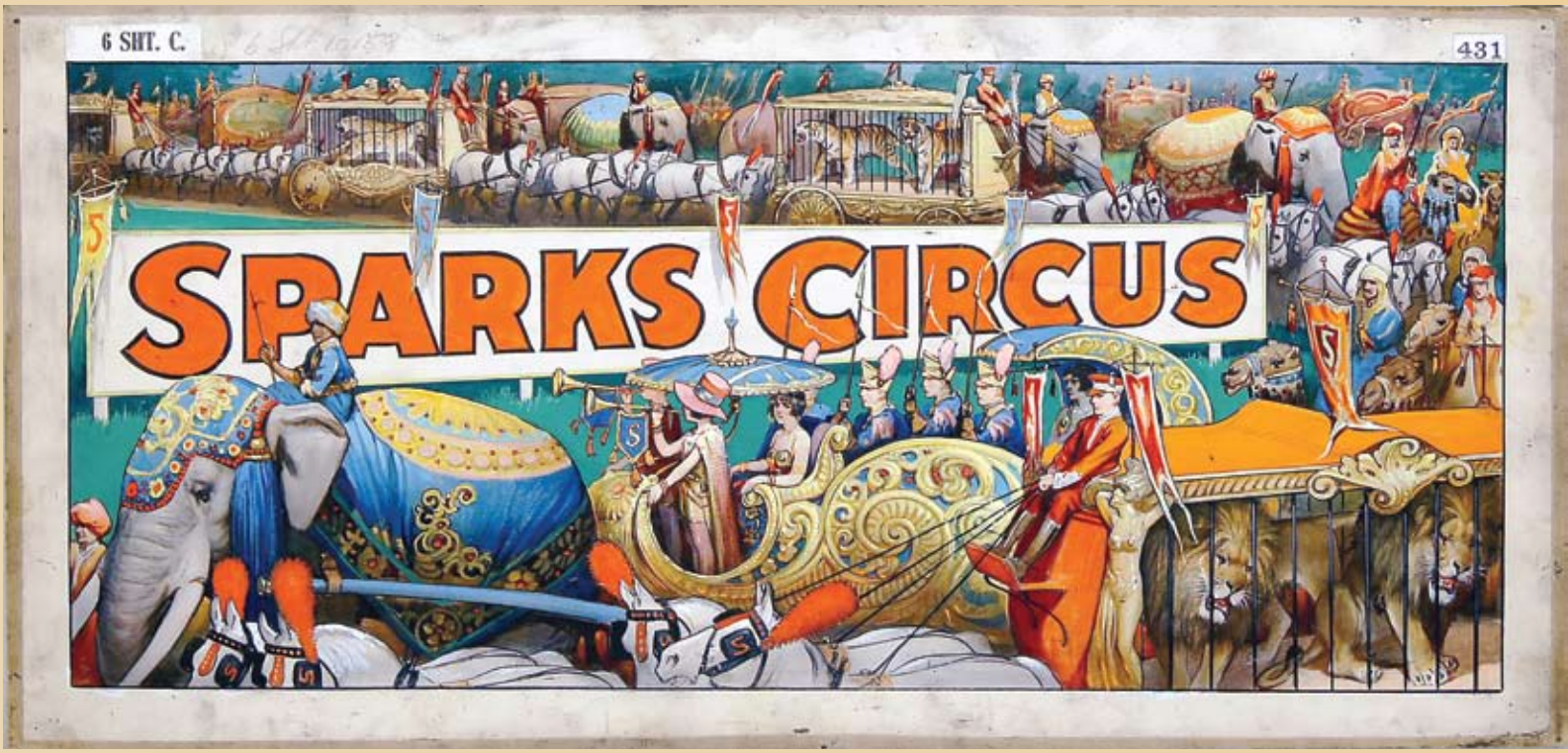


A Hanneford family pyramid on three horses is shown in this design used for many sizes of posters up to 20 sheets. Comedy rider "Poodles" Hanneford (1891-1967) and the Hanneford family were hired by John Ringling, making their debut in the United States on Barnum & Bailey in 1915. This c.1934 artwork measures 27¾ x 21¾".

This stock design is arguably one of the more artistic produced by Erie Lithograph Company. The cantering white horse and pretty rider were painted about 1929. The design was used to layout three sheet posters for Sparks Circus in 1930, Cole Bros. Circus in 1935, and other shows during the years of the Great Depression. A similar, less-vertical version of this painting was used in the creation of a Cole Bros. one sheet that found its way into the collections of many circus fans across the country. The dimensions of the original are 10 x 19".

Endnotes

1. "Selling Safety," *Kentucky Law Enforcement,* Fall 2014, Vol. 13, No. 3, p. 48.
2. "Museum Gets Unsurpassed Collection," *Baraboo News Republic,* Oct. 11, 1972.
3. "Circus Poster Collection Added to Museum Display," *Schlitz News* (Milwaukee, Wisconsin) June 23, 1967.
4. *The Evening Republican* (Meadeville, Pennsylvania), Oct. 31, 1890.
5. Examples of several Erie Lithograph Printing Co. stock circus poster catalogues are on file at the Robert L. Parkinson Library, Small Collections, Erie Litho Co. file.
6. F. J. Walker letter to M.E. Crookson, Dec. 30, 1899, on file at the Robert L. Parkinson Library, Small Collections, Erie Litho Co.
7. Whitman, Benjamin, *Nelson's biographical dictionary and historical reference book of Erie County,* Pennsylvania, Higginson Book Co. (Salem, Massachusetts), 2004, p. 497; Pennsylvania county court reports: containing cases decided in the courts of the several counties of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, Vol. 30, 1906, T. & J. W. Johnson & Co. (Philadelphia), pp 2-3.
8. "Important Deal," *The Piqua Daily Call* (Piqua, Ohio) June 3, 1901; "Color Artists," The Cincinnati Enquirer (Cincinnati, Ohio) Feb. 4, 1900.
9. F. J. Walker letter to Charles Ringing, Jan. 22, 1901, Fred D. Pfening III archives.
10. The shows listed are based on a survey of posters on file at the Robert L. Parkinson Library.
11. "Faithful animal found dead after fire is extinguished," *The Philadelphia Inquirer* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania), Mar. 22, 1902; "Fire at Erie," Star-Gazette (Elmira, New York) Mar. 21, 1902.
12. "Stole Blood and Thunder," *The Evening World* (New York) Feb. 10, 1903.
13. *Pennsylvania County Court Reports,* pp. 1-5.
14. "Doings of Labor," *The Wilkes-Barre News,* Aug. 27, 1907, p. 2; "Effort to "Queer" Circus", *The Plain Speaker* (Hazleton, Pennsylvania), Aug. 31, 1907; *The Typographical Journal: The Official Paper of the International Typographical Union of North America,* Vol. 32, No 1, 1908, pp. 59-60.
15. Spangenberg, Kristin L., *The Amazing American Circus Poster: the Strobridge Lithographing Company, Cincinnati Art Museum* (Cincinnati, Ohio), 2011, p. 25.
16. "Department of Erie Lithograph and Printing Co. Will Move to Norwood, January 1," *The Cincinnati Enquirer* (Cincinnati, Ohio), Dec. 5, 1913, p. 5.
17. Fox, Charles Philip, and Tom Parkinson, *Billers, Banners and Bombast: the Story of Circus Advertising,* Pruett Publishing Co. (Boulder, Colorado), p. 37.
18. The shows listed are based on a survey of posters on file at the Robert L. Parkinson Library.
19. McClintock, P. M. "Cole Bros. Circus Curse," *Bandwagon,* July-Aug. 1966, p. 8.

Pinito del Oro

The Spanish Star of the Swinging Trapeze

by Greg Parkinson

Stunning aerial artistry, a beaming personality, and a genuine passion for performing perilous maneuvers on a lofty trapeze bar – it was a combination that made her a beloved big-top performer. Her breathtaking presentation appeared effortless and was the epitome of grace and daring. Working at dizzying heights without a net or safety device of any kind, she thrilled audiences on both sides of the Atlantic. She fell to the ring several times during her career, yet after each of these mishaps she returned to her trade. She was called "the Spanish Angel," and in the mid-20th century, Pinito del Oro reigned as one of the world's greatest circus stars.

Cristina Maria del Pino Segura Gomez was born on November 6, 1931 in Las Palmas, the capital of Gran Canaria, one of Spain's Canary Islands.[1] She was

Pinito and her husband Juan during their first season with Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey. Circus World Museum

The star aerialist wore a light cape and held a burst of peacock feathers in this 1950 publicity photo.

Fred D. Pfening III collection

the youngest of seven children who all participated in the modest family circus led by her father, Jose Segura. When she was nine years old, Cristina was introduced to performing. She began on a tight-wire – something that she later claimed she very much disliked. It was her older sister, Esther, who did the trapeze act in the Gran Circo Segura.

Her brothers and sisters gave Cristina the nickname "Pinito," Spanish for little pine tree. Her father added "del Oro" (of gold), and soon her stage name became Pinito del Oro. World War II was raging throughout Europe when on a rainy night in 1943 the Segura circus was traveling between dates in Spain. One of the show's trucks overturned and crashed. Esther was riding in that truck and was killed. Afterwards, Pinito was called upon to fill in for her sister on the Washington trapeze.[2] She was only 12 years old.

Pinito's act developed rapidly, and she was on her way to becoming a genuine sensation in Spain. Audience members could not take their eyes off of the pretty young aerialist. In 1948 while performing in Huelva, a city on Spain's southwest coast, Pinito experienced a very serious fall. She struck her head and was in a coma for eight days according to news accounts, but she recovered and before long went back to work on the trapeze.

In 1949 Pinito del Oro was again performing with the family circus. On October 1 the show was appearing in Yecla.[3] There Umberto Bedini[4] saw Pinito's trapeze act, and on that very day he offered her a contract to join the Ringling circus for the 1950 season. The previous year Bedini had been appointed by John Ringling North as European Representative for Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey.[5] Pinito del Oro signed the contract that Bedini offered on the spot. It called for her to perform her trapeze act "33 feet from the ground – as seen today at the circus Segura in Yecla (Spain)."[6] She was to be paid $300 per week.

Before leaving for America, Pinito performed in the

Pinito del Oro posed for the camera on August 30, 1952 in Fond du Lac, Wisconsin.

Used with permission from Illinois State University's Special Collections, Milner Library

Diaz brothers Christmas circus in Valencia. She married Juan de la Fuente, and they departed for the States in early 1950. Their fares from Spain to Sarasota were advanced by the show.[7] At the Ringling-Barnum winter quarters, the young star to be and her husband (who had become Pinito's rigger and spotter), began to become acquainted with staff and other performers as rehearsals got underway.

Making her entrance for the 1952 "Butterfly Lullaby" aerial production is the now legendary Pinito del Oro.
Circus World Museum

On April 5, 1950, Pinito del Oro made her American debut in New York's Madison Square Garden. She was 18 years old. This marked the beginning of seven unforgettable seasons with Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey as the featured center ring performer in the show's magnificent aerial ballets. Introduced to audiences as "Spain's Lovely Star of the Swinging Trapeze,"[8] Pinito del Oro was the ideal headliner for the new production named "Seville."

During her second tour with "The Big One," Pinito was surrounded by "Sixty Alluring Aloha Girls Aloft."[9] "Lovely Luawana Lady" was sung by a recently hired vocalist, Harold Ronk, to accompany the aerial extravaganza. Cecil B. DeMille immortalized the "Luawana" production in his epic film *The Greatest Show on Earth,* but Pinito del Oro's act was not seen on the silver screen when the movie was released in early 1952.[10]

The Ringling-Barnum aerial ballets had a different theme each year. In 1952 it was "Butterfly Lullaby." The next year it had an American Indian theme, "Minnehaha," and in 1954 it was "Rocket to the Moon." Pinito del Oro's amazing balancing trapeze act was the centerpiece of each production.

The 1955 season was Pinito's sixth on *The Greatest Show on Earth.* With another Hawaiian theme, the aerial ballet was called "On Honolulu Bay." When Merle Evan's band began to play the new Irving Caesar and John Ringling North song, "Impossible," the spotlights hit Pinito del Oro portraying the White Princess high above the center ring. Caesar's lyrics fit perfectly. Those who remembered the scene described it as a magical never-to-be-forgotten presentation of Pinito's act.

Pinito del Oro continued to be treated like the star she was. In 1956 she was paid $400 per week, had a private dressing wagon on the lot, and was given the large stateroom on the train that the incredible hand-balancer Unus (Franz Furtner) had occupied the year before.[11] The theme of the aerial ballet that year was "Mexicanorama,"

This 1952 publicity photograph was taken in Sarasota at the Ringling-Barnum winter quarters. Used with permission from Illinois State University's Special Collections, Milner Library

and Pinito was again showcased as the center ring star of the production.

As Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey folded its big top for the last time on the outskirts of Pittsburgh, so too ended Pinito del Oro's seven-year association with John Ringling North and his circus – an employment that had also included multiple appearances with shows produced by North in Cuba. She returned to her homeland and entered the next phase of her celebrated career.

In November 1956, Pinito was invited to appear in one of the world's first international circus festivals, the Gran Competicion Mundial del Circo in Barcelona. There she was proclaimed "Reina del Festival" (Queen of the Festival). She subsequently performed with Circo Price in Madrid and at a large colosseum show in Lisbon, Portugal. These and other appearances launched the new European chapter of her career.[12]

Cirkus Scott, Sweden's leading circus, featured Pinito del Oro in 1957. When that show was appearing in Stockholm in April, Pinito suffered another life-threatening fall. She fractured her skull as well as several bones in her hands and feet. Yet, by the end of the year she was back drawing crowds to the Deutschlandhalle in Berlin to see her performance.

The sensational Spanish aerialist was in Sweden with Cirkus Scott again in 1958. In September and October of that year, Pinito del Oro received top billing in Cirque Medrano, the legendary circus venue in Paris. Thereafter, she returned to Spain where on December 9, 1958 she was crowned as "The World's Greatest Circus Performer" at a festival in Madrid. A return to the United States was in store for 1959. That year she toured under canvas with the Clyde Beatty-Cole Bros. Circus. The souvenir program referred to her as "the radiant star of the swinging, swirling high trapeze" and "Spain's goddess of balanced flight."[13]

After the season with the Beatty-Cole show, Pinito del Oro went home to the Canary Islands. In 1960 she received top billing with the Gran Circo Español, and then performed her trapeze act for what was thought to be for last time on December 4, 1960 in the Zoo Circus in Las Palmas – a show in which she had a financial interest.[14] She opened a hotel in Las Palmas and began to pursue non-circus endeavors. Several years passed by. In December 1966, Pinito was invited to present an award to her niece, Carmen del Teide Segura, herself an excellent trapeze performer. The event took place at Circo Price in Madrid. Dominique Jando described the scene writing "Pinito had only to present an award to Carmen, but when she entered the ring, the house went berserk; they were chanting her name, and what was originally Carmen's

Here is a press photo that appeared in the 1953 Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey program.

Used with permission from Illinois State University's Special Collections, Milner Library

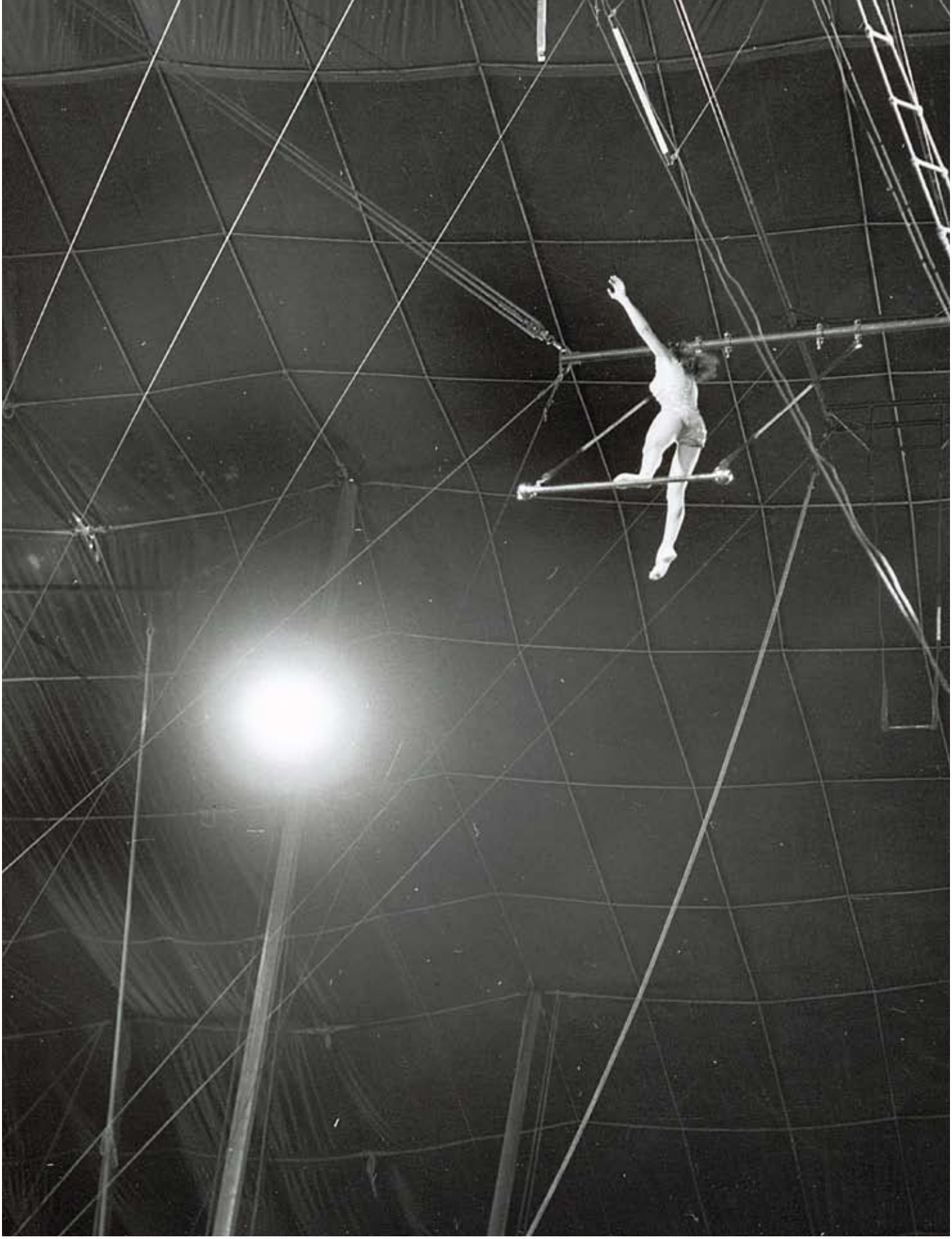
Pinito's exuberant personality shines through in this photo taken by Sverre Braathen on the lot in London, Ontario, July 8, 1953. Used with permission from Illinois State University's Special Collections, Milner Library

meticulously staged tribute became a spontaneous and wild audience tribute to Pinito del Oro."[15]

The audience response to her appearance in Madrid drew Pinito back once again to her first love, and she was persuaded to come out of retirement. It had been more than six years since she had publicly performed her act, but on March 2, 1967 she once again climbed the rope ladder to her trapeze bar. Circo Price posters promoted her return and proclaimed that she was "La Reina del Trapecio" (the Queen of the Trapeze). By all accounts it was a glorious and triumphant return.

She performed with Circo Price as it made its annual spring/summer road tour until the ill-fated day of August 21, 1967. On that date in Laredo, Spain, as she began her descent from the trapeze, the hardware that held her rope ladder failed. This was the third and last near-fatal fall of Pinito's career. It was a long recovery. However, like the phoenix, she courageously rose to perform again with Circo Price in 1969 and 1970. Then the news came that Circo Price would be demolished for new development soon after its last performance on April 17, 1970. Pinito del Oro announced that her career would also come to an end on that day after her final performance with the Spanish circus she adored.

In the years that followed, Pinito's life, of course, went forward. She enjoyed sharing her stories and memorabilia with friends and guests in her home in Las Palmas, and she was often seen at circuses and festivals in Spain and elsewhere. She raised a daughter and a son[16]; divorced her husband, Juan, after a 20-year marriage; and took a sec-



Pinito del Oro balanced on her swinging trapeze under the dome of the Ringling-Barnum big top in Washington, D.C. in 1955.

Private collection

ond husband 20 years her junior. She published no less than eight books – both true accounts of her brilliant circus endeavors and also fictional volumes. In 1990, two decades after her last trapeze performance, the Spanish government bestowed Pinito del Oro with the "Premio Nacional del Circo." In 1998 she was awarded the "Medalla de Oro de las Bellas Artes" (gold medal of the fine arts).

Pinito's autobiography was published in 2010. It is unpretentiously titled *Memorias de una Trapecista.* Just last year when she received yet another major award, the "Medalla de Oro del Canaria," she summed up the essence of how she felt about her circus career when she simply said, "I just felt happy on the trapeze."

Cristina Maria del Pino Segura Gomez – internationally acclaimed as Pinito del Oro – died on October 25, 2017 in Las Palmas. She was 86 years old. BW

Cirkus Scott poster promoting Pinito del Oro's trapeze act in Sweden in 1958.

Circus World Museum

Endnotes

1. The Canary Islands are located just off the northwest coast of Africa. Although geographically part of the African continent, the islands have had a long political and cultural connection with Spain and are thus considered to be part of Europe.
2. A Washington trapeze is a long and relatively heavy trapeze bar that was designed by H. R. Keyes Washington in the 19th century to facilitate a mostly standing performance as opposed to a smaller trapeze bar used in "single trapeze" and "flying return" acts.
3. Yecla is a town in eastern Spain positioned between the cities of Murcia and Valencia.
4. Umberto Schichtholz-Bedini was a talent agent with offices in Paris and Milan, Italy.
5. *Billboard*, March 27, 1948, p. 73.
6. Performance Agreement for the 1950 season between Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Combined Shows, Inc. and Pinito del Oro, dated October 1, 1949, Robert L. Parkinson Library & Research Center, Circus World Museum.
7. Ibid.
8. Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey 1950 Circus Magazine & Program, p. 66.
9. Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey 1951 Circus

Circo Price poster advertising Pinito del Oro's appearance in the Spanish capital. Circus World Museum

Poster for Pinito del Oro's "farewell to the ring" performances at the Zoo Circus in Las Palmas in 1960. "The Spaniard who amazed the world" returned to perform again 1967-1970. Circus World Museum

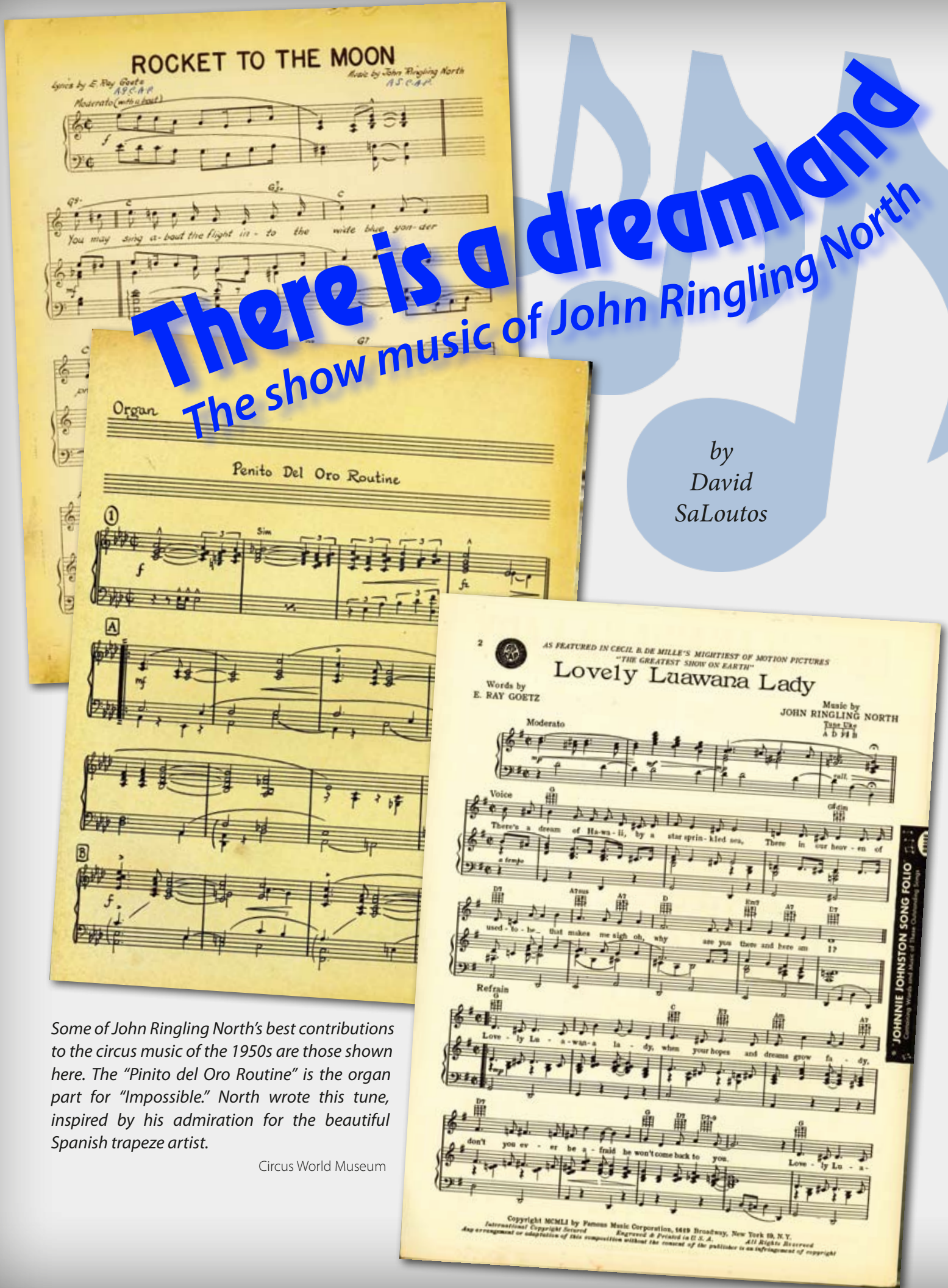
Magazine & Program, p. 62. The number of aerial performers in the Luawana web production varied throughout the season.

10. Pinito del Oro had hidden her long dark hair under a short blonde wig and shot scenes doubling for the film's heroine, Holly as portrayed by Betty Hutton, whose scripted role had her presenting parts of Pinito's actual act. However, none of this footage was used in the *Greatest Show on Earth.* Various reasons have been advanced to explain why the footage of Pinito doubling as Holly was cut. Some sources claim that DeMille refused to include Pinito del Oro in the film's major on-screen credits alongside its big Hollywood stars. An article in the 1952 Ringling-Barnum program written by Frank Braden stated that it was actually Mr. North who kept Pinito from appearing in the motion picture for unstated reasons. Other sources claimed that North wanted to protect the public drawing power of his young circus star. In her autobiography, Pinito wrote that in the end it came down to "el desacuerdo economico" (a financial disagreement).
11. Performance Agreement for the 1956 season between Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Combined Shows, Inc. and Pinito del Oro, Robert L. Parkinson Library & Research Center, Circus World Museum.
12. Dominique Jando, "Pinito del Oro," Circopedia website.
13. Clyde Beatty-Cole Bros. Circus Official Program and Daily Magazine, 1959, p. 10.
14. Tom Parkinson, "Circus Trouping," *Billboard,* November 19, 1960, p. 174.
15. Jando, Op cit.
16. The names of Pinito del Oro's children are Maria Isabel and Juan José.

There is a dreamland

The show music of John Ringling North

by David SaLoutos



Some of John Ringling North's best contributions to the circus music of the 1950s are those shown here. The "Pinito del Oro Routine" is the organ part for "Impossible." North wrote this tune, inspired by his admiration for the beautiful Spanish trapeze artist.

Circus World Museum

Born after Ringling-Barnum folded its tents, I had no idea John Ringling North wrote music for the circus. Thirty some years ago I was a First of May at Circus World Museum, and loved hearing and absorbing stories from everyone. One day Bob Parkinson played some records of North songs and talked about the music he wrote for the show. Later I overheard a group of circus musicians talking about John Ringling North's music and one of them reiterated the joke, "How do you get your music played on the Ringling show?" Answer: "Own the show!"

In early 1993 I was searching for music ideas for Circus World's big top show, and Greg Parkinson suggested the song "Impossible," supposedly one of Mr. North's better tunes. On the hunt for the song in the Library & Research Center, I came upon a box in the Merle Evens collection containing hand written arrangements for "Fiesta," "U. N.," "Dreamland," and "Rocket To The Moon," all North creations from productions on Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey. Not finding "Impossible," I kept looking and in a folder labeled Pinito del Oro music, I came upon "Impossible" and "On Honolulu Bay," the aerial ballet songs for 1955.

We used "Impossible" to accompany the aerial ballet that summer, and in July, University of Wisconsin Professor Jerry Stich invited me to narrate a concert of traditional circus music that August. He asked if there was anything I would like to sing, and I told him about the John Ringling North music I had seen. Quickly making copies of surviving parts for "Impossible," "On Honolulu Bay," and "Dreamland," we threw the music together in one rehearsal. The band had to figure out substitutions for missing parts, and we added Larry Stout on Hammond organ to recreate the 1950s Ringling band sound. It was fun bringing these songs back, and I have had a soft spot in my heart for them ever since.

It was exhilarating to dig deeper into the music of John Ringling North at the CWM Library & Research Center. I discovered more music, manuscripts, letters, contracts, and reel-to-reel tapes of actual performances captured under canvas in the 1950s. In order to write about the music, I wanted and needed to hear it. That was the only way to get a good feel for it. Listening directly to the old recordings helped me to develop this overview of North's musical contributions to the circus between 1950 and 1955.

The Parkinson Library has digitized selections of John Ringling North's songs and placed them online. The sound recordings referenced in this article can be accessed on a temporary website through the following link: <https://www.cwmdigitacollections.com/bandwagon-vol-62-no-1.html>.

Above, Pinito del Oro is performing in the background of this John Ringling North press photo that composited the two images.

Circus World Museum

In 1955, John Ringling North's music crossed over into mainstream pop when Sammy Kaye recorded "Impossible" and Mitch Miller recorded "On Honolulu Bay," both for the Columbia label. Irving Caesar wrote the lyrics for each song.

David SaLoutos collection

Few would say every North song was a masterpiece. In fact, at the time, many circus fans did not like the addition of vocal production numbers and showgirls to the circus. However, since John lived part of the year in New York, and socialized with creative music and Broadway talent, he believed such recruits would be the right path for his circus. There was no doubt that times were changing, with families moving to the suburbs and staying home to enjoy television. The new technology brought performances right into your living room on a small, black and white screen. Employing expansive, colorful, and tuneful productions was one of the ways John chose to combat the new entertainment medium. He assembled a production staff to deliver this concept, and hired creative talent from New York and Hollywood. This led to friction between circus veterans and the new recruits, but it also generated new and exciting

additions to *The Greatest Show on Earth.*

John Ringling North had some musical ability, as did his uncles, Charles and Alf T., but these talents were limited. Irving Caesar, John's lyricist for the 1955 season said, "John wasn't a good pianist. As a matter of fact, he was a very poor pianist. I'd say he had the kind of talent that might occasionally produce a good song, but I don't call that a songwriting talent." John wrote many melodies with difficult intervals, making them challenging to sing, even for a trained vocalist like Harold Ronk. These acrobatic melodies were also difficult to remember, which guaranteed audiences would not be humming his tunes leaving the big top. Nevertheless, materials in the John Ringling North papers at the Parkinson Library show that John was confident his songs could cross over from the circus to the pop music charts. After all, it was the early 1950s, before rock and roll, and the hit parade was loaded with sentimental ballads, peppy rhythmic numbers, and show tunes.

The music John Ringling North wrote for the shows of the 1950s would soon be largely forgotten. However, it deserves to be re-examined because there was an innocent charm to the songs he penned, along with an underlying depth of feeling about what makes the circus a unique and special art form. That was John's strength… he knew the pacing, the tempos, the colorful nature of the performances, and tried to capture what made the circus special in his music.

1950

In 1950, John Ringling North wrote "Come to Vienna" for a "dashing and highly colorful display of super-horsemanship, romantically reminiscent of the gay old Austrian capital's famous Spanische Hofreitschule, in the days of Emperor Franz Joseph… OLD VIENNA."[1] It was a good tune delivered in a brisk waltz tempo, but it was not easy for the vocalist to sing at that pace. On the other hand, it was show music that was well suited to the hoof beats of the equine performers.

1951

The next year, John began collaborating with a new lyricist, E. Ray Goetz, who had fashioned lyrics for several Tin Pan Alley tunes and stage musicals in the 1910s and 1920s, producing one hit, "For Me and My Gal." The team of North and Goetz's first endeavor was "Lovely Luawana Lady," which appeared in the 1951 aerial ballet as well as the DeMille film. "Enchanting ethereal extravaganza 'LUAWANA' featuring Pinito del Oro, beautiful swinging trapeze star riding tiptoe on a moonbeam, with a ballet of sixty alluring aloha girls aloft!" It definitely did not disappoint with a North melody perfectly suited for the Hawaiian theme, and the tongue-in-cheek lyrics written by Goetz helping to put it over:

> "Lovely Luawana Lady, when your hopes and dreams grow fady,
> don't you ever be afraid he won't come back to you." (or)
>
> "Ever since he's back, there's been no lack of gals, but, gee, they're slow.
> They don't pack that wicky wack you taught him there when the moon was low."[2]

Merle Evans and his band are in the left foreground of this photograph of the 1951 Hawaiian-themed aerial ballet "Luawana," featuring North's composition "Lovely Luawana Lady." The picture was taken in Madison Square Garden. Circus World Museum

Famous Music Corporation copyrighted this sheet music in 1951, before the release of Cecil B. DeMille's The Greatest Shown on Earth. *The Technicolor film included this song written by John Ringling North and E. Ray Goetz.*

David SaLoutos collection

1952

Buoyed by the success of "Luawana," the team of North and Goetz set about writing all of the production songs for the 1952 edition of Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey. This would have been a year to capitalize on the success of the DeMille film, but the music they wrote did not particularly sparkle. "Butterfly Lullaby" was sung during the aerial ballet, followed by Pinito del Oro's trapeze performance. "Butterfly" is an old-fashioned production tune, with a gentle lilt. It is not great, but after hearing it three times, it stayed with me. With a large ensemble of female performers in the air, colorful costumes and other production elements, the presentation must have soared above the lyrics:

> "Don't you let love flutter by, when like a butterfly it captures your eye. Let your heart fly high and higher, till that riot on high, swings into your butterfly lullaby."[3]

Lavishly costumed ladies styling for the camera before circling the Ringling-Barnum hippodrome track during "The Good Old Times" spec in 1952. North and Goetz wrote all the production songs that season.

Used with permission from Illinois State University's Special Collections, Milner Library

The production continued with additional music elements taken from the opera "Madame Butterfly" by Puccini, and the song "Poor Butterfly" was woven in and out of reprises of "Butterfly Lullaby." Someone definitely had a sense of humor.

"Super-spectacle sublime… Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey presents the most magnificent and exhilarating entertainment feast ever created for the delectation of circus spectators, 'The Good Old Times.'"[4] The 1952 spec tune recalled yesteryear, and set the mood for what had to be a pretty eclectic and fun production. The melody is sing-able, but it keeps moving all over the scale. Portrayed as "a nostalgic musical treat, lavishly garnished with unprecedented humor, fantasy and splendor,"[5] it would be wonderful to watch film footage to see if the production was presented straight with a few laughs or if it was all comedy.

"The Good Old Times" spec used a vast array of musical cues, transporting the audience to the days of Helen of Troy, to Hannibal crossing the Alps, to Cleopatra and Mark Anthony, King Arthur and Queen Guinevere, Lady Godiva and Peeping Tom (accompanied by the vocal "I Only Have Eyes for You"), Robin Hood, the merry men and Friar Tuck, Christopher Columbus (quoting from the novelty jump tune "Christopher Columbus" by Fats Waller), Ponce de Leon and the Fountain of Youth, Henry VIII and his wives, Pocahontas and Captain John Smith, the court of Louis XIV, Fairy Tales for all ages, the Napoleonic Days

Pinito del Oro waits for her entrance for the Indian-themed "Minnehaha" aerial production. Sverre Braathen snapped this image on July 12, 1953 in Detroit.

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(lifting from "Can-Can"), a vocal snippet of "Lovely Luawana Lady," followed again by "Can-Can," a vocal taken from "Look for the Silver Lining," another vocal segment of "Lovely Luawana Lady," capped off with a reprise of "Some Day, Today Will Be the Good Old Times," with these rather confusing lyrics:

> "Each yesterday's tomorrow is today,
> today is just tomorrow's yesterday,
> years may come and go, days will gleam and glow,
> if you teach your heart to know.
>
> "Someday, today will be the good old times,
> if you will climb each rainbow when it shines…
> then someday you will say, God bless this yesterday, [key change]
> If you'll caress these blessings here they'll cling,
> through years like souvenirs of love and spring,
> if you'll be gay and fill your heart with chimes,
> today will be the good old times!"[6]

"Mardi Gras" was the theme for the equestrian display featuring the song "New Orleans, the Mardi Gras and You." The melody of this music was fairly good, but the tempo required to keep pace with the rhythm of the horses, was so brisk that it took a real effort by the vocalist to keep up and stay in time with the music:

> "New Orleans, the Mardi Gras and you,
> You knew how to make dreams come true;
> I saw you and joined the gay parade, driving by to the masquerade…
> That night of nights in New Orleans!"[7]

The North and Goetz song has the tempo of "Picnic In the Park," but does not have the same forward movement and cadence. Instead, it is choppy and disjointed. Even so, the lyrics were delivered with great gusto.

Last, and definitely least worthy for 1952, was the "Circus Climax Colossal" and "Gold Dollar Moon" (Kick Those Clouds Away), bearing a strong resemblance to the contemporary advertising jingle, "See the USA, in your Chevrolet." A good hook like that can work for a finale song, but this song was really disjointed and cobbled together. Even Harold Ronk sounded unenthused as he sang the lyrics to the disappointing finale number:

> "Kick those clouds away, pick a dream today; for tomorrow.
> Cares will bite the dust, if in God we trust; good bye sorrow.
> Hopes and dreams will soon be risin,' when the yeller moon is at horizon. Though it's dark at noon, keep your heart in tune; gaily daily.
> Kick those clouds away, holler hip-hooray, old gold dollar moon."[8]

As if once through was not enough, the last line was repeated without taking the melody up at the end. Without a musical climax at the end, the song just fizzles out.

1953

The music improved slightly for 1953 with "Minnehaha" for the aerial ballet, "Gone Are the Days" featured in the "Candyland" spec, "Derby Day Honeymoon" as the

Merle Evans and his musicians accompany a Ringling-Barnum performance in 1953. Note the Hammond organ at the lower front of the bandstand platform.

Circus World Museum

The "Candyland" spec payoff float and its passengers are about to enter the big top on a windy summer day in 1953.

Used with permission from Illinois State University's Special Collections, Milner Library

equestrian display, and "Americana, U.S.A." for the finale. The program proclaimed the aerial ballet to be, "The breath-taking and sensationally stunning new mid-air extravaganza 'Minnehaha' featuring Pinito del Oro, beautiful star of the swinging trapeze with an exquisite ballet of sixty alluring maidens aloft."[9] This song sounded like a cross between "Indian Love Call," from "Rose Marie," and the Hamm's beer commercial "Land of Sky Blue Waters." It had a driving tom-tom beat, that probably worked wonderfully well for the aerial number. It also employed other Native American musical selections with tom-toms along with the lyrics:

"Come to me my Minnehaha, where the river meets the sea,
by the banks of Winnewawa, come and dream love's dream with me."[10]

The Candyland spec featured "Gone Are the Days," a song that expressed a nostalgic view of the past. It was one of the more memorable tunes that year, and was easier to sing than 1952's "Someday, today will be the good old times."

"Gone are the days of our Toyland my dear,
what mem'ry sways back to yesteryear.
Gone are the ways of those schooldays that we spent,
to the circus off we went, and you cost me my last cent.
Two lives May to December, we have so much to remember,
gone are the days but the mem'ry precious too,
has kept your love for me and my love for you."[11]

Then audiences were treated to a medley of tunes that included "I'm an Old Cowhand," "Frankie and Johnny," "Here Comes the Showboat," "Swanee," "School Days," "Believe Me (If All Those Endearing Young Charms)," "We're Off To See The Wizard," "Somewhere Over the Rainbow," "The Greatest Show On Earth," and "The Billboard March." All of these no doubt fit the costuming, animals, dance steps, floats and vignettes parading around the track. Finally, the medley returned to a reprise of "Gone are the Days."

"Derby Day Honeymoon" was written for the equestrian display, "a surpassingly colorful cavalcade in the gay mood of Kentucky's famous annual racing classic"[12] according to the program. This song is basically a cakewalk, and although you would not say it is memorable, it is well suited to the hoof beats of prancing horses, and thereby it nicely fulfills its purpose. After the song concludes, the musical arrangement goes into other southern songs like "Way Down Upon the Swanee River" and "Dixie," and concludes with a reprise of "Derby Day Honeymoon."

The finale for 1953 was a rousing, breath-taking and sensationally spectacular new patriotic bombshell called:

"Americana, U.S.A." for which I could not find a recording at Circus World Museum. However, by listening to the 1953 Overture containing all four of the North/Goetz songs, and knowing the other three, the fourth song can be identified as "Americana, U.S.A." Although the Overture does not include the lyrics of the songs, "Americana, U.S.A." is a zippy, patriotic ragtime tune, and sounds as soul stirringly optimistic as anything George M. Cohan produced. It surely would have provided, as the program stated, "a colossal climactic conclusion to the stupendous 1953 edition of The Greatest Show on Earth."[13]

1954

The 1954 season featured another quartet of North/Goetz songs that was the best of this four-year collaboration. E. Ray Goetz died in June of that year, ending his collaboration with North. I would contend that Goetz's lyrics were one reason that North's melodies never got very far out of the big top. Although Mr. North was not writing songs on par with the top tunes of the day, his melodies and chord structures were decent. Of course, John never worked too hard at song writing. His sentimental melodies often harkened back to simpler times, but thanks to his production staff, they were woven nicely into themes of fantasy, spectacle, and unabashed patriotism, and were presented at a tempo well suited to the pace of a circus performance. The Goetz lyrics, on the other hand, seemed more suited for Tin Pan Alley of 30 to 40 years earlier. It is true that when you examine lyrics without the context of the performance, they can seem ridiculous. Consider, for example, the lyrics of Rosemary Clooney's novelty hit, "Come on-a my house, my house I'm gonna give a you peach and pear and I love your hair ah" or Lennon and McCartney's "She loves you, yeah, yeah, yeah!" It might be as simple as to state that the team of North and Goetz created music, but the sum of their individual contributions was not necessarily greater as a collaborative song writing team.

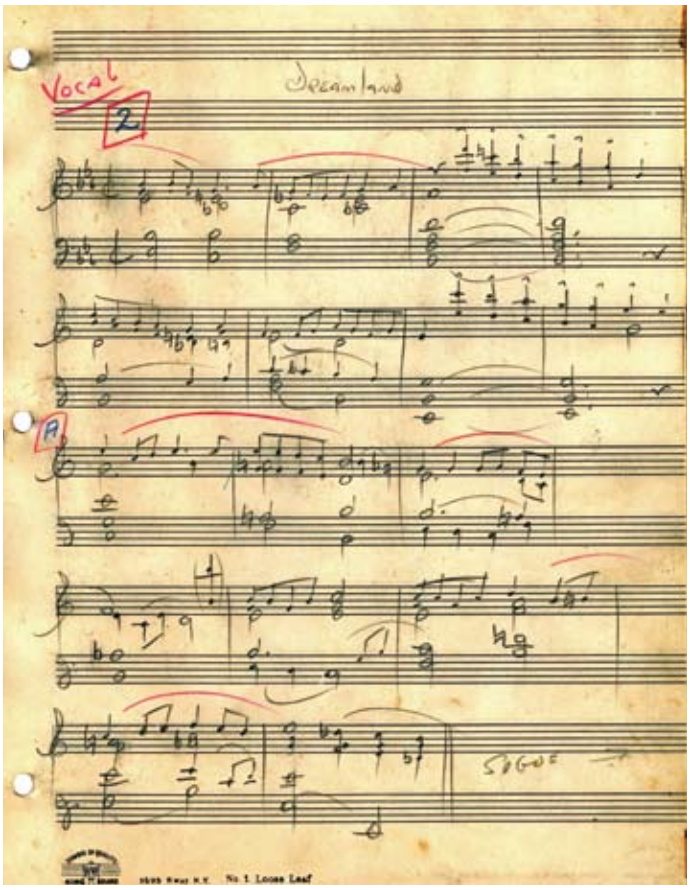
1954's "Dreamland" was another sentimental "looking back to yesteryear" song. The difference, however, was a chorus with a lot of heart in both melody and lyrics. It was ideal for a Ringling/Barnum spec, and while looking back at what was gone, it had a ray of sunshine for the future.

> "Somewhere there is a dreamland,
> crowded with mem'ries and dreams to be.
> Somewhere a cake and ice cream land,
> Holds all life's treasures for you and me.
> For each memory vanished, there comes one that is new.
> Dream days, ne'er will be vanished,
> If I can be there, my darling with you."[14]

The program declared, "The most magnificent creation in circus history," offering a glimpse of what was presented with, "stupendous new musical super-spectacle blending Arabian nights with Fairyland in a fabulous fantasy of rainbow radiance."[15] After "Dreamland" concluded, classical themes and fairy tale songs were heard before resolving into a reprise of "Dreamland." For this spectacle, Circus World Museum preserves a handwritten manuscript in a three-ring binder with some ideas scratched out and others written in their place, allowing insights into the creative process in scoring a spec.

"Americana, U.S.A." was the rousing patriotic finale for the 1953 performance. The song of the same name was written by John Ringing North and E. Ray Goetz.

Circus World Museum



The 1954 handwritten manuscript for "Dreamland" is preserved in the Merle Evans collection at the Robert L. Parkinson Library & Research Center. It is unknown if Evans or someone else inscribed the annotations throughout the multiple-page arrangement. Circus World Museum

"Rocket to the Moon" was the aerial ballet followed with Ms. del Oro's trapeze routine. Pinito's arrival in a rocket themed spec float, carrying her into the center ring, along with the costuming and other themed elements, must have been exciting and grand. Rather than a futuristic sounding piece of music, "Rocket to The Moon" was a showgirl production number worthy of the great Ziegfeld. One can imagine the lyrics and music were a huge hit with audiences:

"You may sing about the flight into the wide blue yonder,
Praise the sabre jet and the stratosphere,
But they're only children's play, for what they've planned today
in this world of miracles that now is here.
You can reserve a trip to the moon, on the first trip leaving soon,
But ev'ry space cadet, has started in to fret,
wants to be Columbus of the air.
He's bought a uniform with pockets stuffed with rockets
But we all know what he hopes to find up there.

"Take a trip to sky-land, where the night is noon,
Up to yours and my land, on a rocket to the moon.
Moon dream girl affections, wait you night and day,
Follow their directions all along the milky way.
Once upon a time a girl fell for the moon-man it's true,
Therefore why can't I sky lady, do the same thing for you?
Sailing thru the air, dear, to you moon maid soon,
I'll hope to find you waiting, for my rocket to the moon."[16]

The song was followed by "When You Wish Upon a Star," as well as "Stardust" before a fast-paced version (probably for the spin) and then a reprise of "Rocket to the Moon." John did a good job of creating a memorable tune with this one, and while the melody on the verse jumped around, the chorus was much more melodic and would have been enjoyable to sing. The song perfectly fit the aerial production.

"Fiesta" was the equestrian exposition, presenting "picturesque Old Mexico brought north of the Rio Grande in a riot of color and gaiety… a fabulous display of horsemanship."[17]

"Fiesta, Fiesta, confetti and lace,
Fiesta, Fiesta, when love leads a chase,
Thru bow'rs of flow'rs thru each thoroughfare,
While fireworks are lighting balloons in the air.
Then when the leader of the band looks up and they start playing,
Just praise the Lord and then toward a shady nook start straying,
And if in the moonlight, you meet only one,
You'll find your Fiesta of love in the sun."[18]

"Fiesta" aurally captured a proud tradition of Mexican horsemanship and would have been well suited to the visual display. It was also easier to sing than earlier equestrian songs.

"The Greatest Show on Earth pays tribute to United Nations on Parade," announced ringmaster Count Nicho-

Count Angelo Nicholas was the Equestrian Director and Ringmaster for Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey between 1951 and 1955. He introduced the acts and maintained the timing of John Ringling North's circus productions.

Circus World Museum

las.[19] Thus began the "Circus Climax Colossal," "symbolizing mankind's universal desire for freedom and friendship, humanitarian ideals of the 60 united nations brought vibrantly to life in a flag-spangled, beauty-studded homage to brotherly love. A touching tribute to President Eisenhower as an illustrious leader both in war and in peace."[20]

> "Here we are together in a huddle, a huddle from the muddle overseas,
> United Nations troupes galore, are gathered on each shore,
> for the first real war on war!
> Keep together, keep our banners flying, flying for our glorious U.N.
> Round the world with flags unfurled, at last we'll make our stand,
> Those United Nations gathered here from every land.
> For peace from war and war for peace we're driving,
> United in a brotherhood of men,
> Instead of dogs of war let's all release, what's for a dove of peace,
> Salute our great U.N."[21]

The finale "U.N." was certainly spirited, but while the brisk melody would have made a terrific instrumental, it moved too fast to be a good vocal. The melody bounced all over the place. The lyrics were also as disjointed as the tune. Nevertheless, Harold Ronk threw excitement at it and put it across. Even though the spec was supposed to honor the United Nations, the music that followed the song was all music of the United States. It was actually another opportunity for American flag waving, rather than supporting the idea of a brotherhood of man. This was 1954 after all, the height of the McCarthy era, so North and his team did not want the circus to appear to be in support of anything that favored communism. The production actually celebrated the fact that the U.N. was located in America.

1955

After E. Ray Goetz passing, John found a new lyricist for 1955 in Irving Caesar. Best known for "Swanee," "Crazy Rhythm," and "Tea for Two," Irving set words to John's music and in the case of "Impossible," John set music to Caesar's words. The team produced some of the finest songs John Ringling North ever wrote for the circus. The tuneful duo turned out "On Honolulu Bay" for the aerial ballet and "Impossible" for Pinito del Oro's trapeze performance, "Three Cheers for Holidays" and "Birthdays" for the spectacle "Holidays," "Mama's in the Park" for the production number featuring 50 elephants, and "Rainbow Around the World" for the Grand Finale.

John's music also crossed over into mainstream pop music that year when Sammy Kaye recorded "Impossible," and Mitch Miller recorded "On Honolulu Bay," both for the Columbia label. Neither record was a hit, but John finally had some of his work recorded by established artists on a major label. His music was favorably reviewed in *The Billboard,* and it was printed by Irving Caesar's publishing company. The lyrics to all the songs also were printed in the souvenir program.

"On Honolulu Bay" was a return to a Hawaiian theme that had proven successful with "Lovely Luawana Lady" four years earlier. John's tune provided a solid foundation for lyrics that were playful and breezy. Even the musical arrangement seemed to be more skillfully crafted, adding to the emotional impact of the songs. The only questionable decision was adding a steel guitar to the bandstand for this number. It sounded over-the-top and comical. Perhaps in

Rudy Bundy was Johnny North's long-time friend and associate. Bundy, himself a professional musician, listens to North's piano playing in the M'Toto Room at the John Ringling Hotel in Sarasota. Circus World Museum

a live performance the Hawaiian guitar was more balanced with the rest of the band.

The initial vocal of "On Honolulu Bay," was followed by an instrumental chorus of "Lovely Luawana Lady" with the lead played on the Hawaiian guitar, before returning to "On Honolulu Bay" and finishing up with "Aloha Oe." All in all, and ignoring the Hawaiian guitar aspect, the music complemented a terrific aerial production.

"Aloha… oh, wait 'till she greets her sweet Papaya,
Betcha I get a big "How-ah-ya" to make me stay.
(and some day) You're gonna hear we're honeymoonin'
Getting' along with just one spoon in
A bowl of poi – for a girl and boy,
On Honolulu Bay!"[22]

Following the cute and clever "On Honolulu Bay" with the simple and sweet love song "Impossible," must have tugged on people's heartstrings and provided even more emotional impact to Ms. del Oro's trapeze routine. The trapeze song began with a short fanfare-style introduction followed by the vocal, rendered admirably by Harold Ronk. The arrangement then skillfully modulated into a three/quarter time rendition of the song as a waltz, adding emotional impact to the experience of the audience watching Pinito del Oro's sensational artistry. It is also interesting that the lyrics to "Impossible" were actually written by Caesar four or five years earlier to be an American version of the 1949 German song "Auf Wiedersehen," which he wanted to bring to America. However, English vocalist Vera Lynn had also heard it and commissioned John Turner and Geoffrey Parsons to write lyrics for it. She obtained the rights to the song first, recorded it, and had a huge 1952 hit in both England and America. Irving Caesar saved his lyrics and thought the adjectives "impossible, incredible, remarkable" were perfectly suited for the circus. He brought his lyrics to John who effortlessly wrote the tune, inspired by his admiration for the beautiful Spanish trapeze artist.

"Impossible, Impossible
To think that you love me,
Incredible, Incredible,
That such a love could be,
Remarkable, Remarkable,
What love like yours can do,
You fill my dreams
Now nothing seems
Impossible with you."[23]

The spec "Holidays" was listed in the program as a "Celestial Calendar Cavalcade" with "Hundreds of Human and Animal Actors participating in the most glittering musical extravaganza ever created, captivating costumer, fantastic floats, rapturous music, a bewildering kaleidoscope of colorful lavishness dedicated to the festive days on the American calendar."[24] Count Nicholas proclaimed in his introduction, "Holidays, a colorful cavalcade of the calendar, as we escape from hum-drum reality, down memory lane,"[25] and then came the song "Three Cheers for Holidays."

"What a gay world, hip hooray world, when our holidays appear;
New Year's Day is a wonderful day, your troubles fly away,
It's a world of fun, fun for everyone, every neighbor wears a grin.
We wake up with a smile and a cheer, when Holidays are here!"[26]

The spectacle then rolled through the calendar: New Year's, Valentine's Day, St. Patrick's Day, Easter (singing "Easter Parade"), 4th of July, Halloween, and Christmas, which led to "Happy Birthday," and the new song "Birthdays!"

"Your birthday, your birthday, is the greatest holiday of all,
Every birthday is dear, any time of the year,
in the summer, winter, spring, or fall [key change to heighten emotion],

There's Christmas, and New Year's, July 4th, Easter, and Thanksgiving,
But that great day when we started living, is the day we always recall,
Yes your birthday, your birthday, is the greatest holiday of all."[27]

The holiday themed spec must have been a hit with the audience. Concluding the production with a song about every person's birthday, and then throwing in a key change and going up to a high note at the end would have given the song a musical punch, which was masterful and genius.

For the 1955 edition, instead of providing a song for the equestrian display, John came up with the idea for a song to accompany the elephant production – a presentation with no less than 50 elephants. The intro by Count Nicholas was, "Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus proudly presents the largest herd of elephants ever assembled, not 10, not 30, but 50 mastadonic mothers and bouncing babies in marching merriment when 'Mama's in the Park!' " The production number started with "Fountain in the Park," an 1884 tune, best known by the first line of the chorus, "While strolling thru the park one day, in the merry, merry month of May," and this segued into the melody for "Mama's in the Park."

"Mama's in the park, Papa's in the park, baby's gonna play all day,
Happy as a lark, happy in the park, Mama puts her cares away,
Lots of shady spots, made for little tots,
when the sandman says I'm here,
Mama sits and knits, Papa he just sits, watching over baby dear.
Listen and you'll hear the sound that we love so well,
Let's hurry right over, ride the carousel,
Here's a treat for you, walking through the zoo,
Makes you think of Noah's ark.
Lots of things to see, everyone can be,
Happy, happy in the park!"[28]

Not only was the ragtime style song spirited and enjoyable, but one can just imagine the various vignettes acted out by special groups of elephants. The musical accompaniment employed "Slim Trombone," a classic trombone smear by Henry Fillmore; silent movie chase music; the song "Pretty Baby" and "Fountain in the Park;" all woven around various reprisals in assorted tempos of "Mama's in the Park." It had to have been incredible.

Once again the "Patriotic panoramic pageantry" of the finale "Rainbow Round the World" was "A thrilling salute to the peace-loving nations of the world." The song was a straightforward march tune that was solid, upbeat and hopeful in its message. Harold Ronk talked favorably about this finale, stating the melody was well written and something he could really get behind and put across. The lyrics printed in the program are bright and optimistically hopeful.

"I see a beautiful rainbow, laughing at clouds in the sky,
And the sun smiling through says to me and to you
Bid your cares and your worries good-bye.
I see in that beautiful rainbow the flags of all nations unfurled,
I hear song and mirth, I see peace on earth,
In that wonderful, beautiful, wonderful, beautiful, marvelous, glorious,
Rainbow around the world!"[29]

1956

The 1955 season was the swan song for John Ringling North's music under the big top. Some of the production staff felt it would be better to use established songs in the new show, and there was a general creative team shake-up for the 1956 production. Songs like "Delores," "Say It with Flowers" and "Hoop-Dee-Doo" were featured. The show

These riders were part of the "Rainbow Round the World" finale presentation in 1955.

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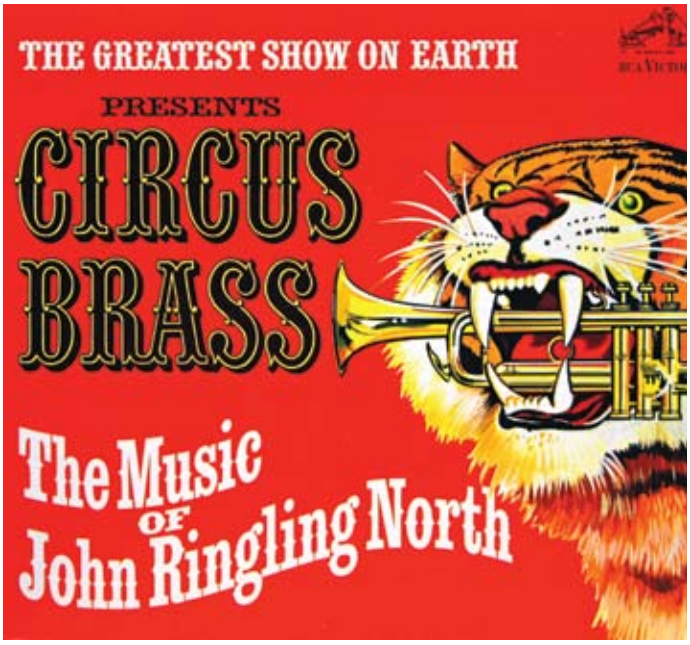

RCA Victor recorded the music of John Ringling North and distributed this album in 1967. David SaLoutos collection

also introduced "Ringling Rock and Roll" for an elephant production number. Of course, the show had ongoing problems in many areas and new challenges that led John to his decision to fold the Ringling tents for good mid-season.

John Ringling North wrote five songs for the 1958 season, but his output from 1950 through 1955 is what holds a special place in circus history. Part of the reason for this is that North's music will be forever linked to the last years of tented shows for Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey.

It is quite probable that some of his songs would have benefitted from better arrangements, a different style of delivery, or different instrumentation in the accompaniment. Just the same, they were irreplaceable as an integral part of *The Greatest Show on Earth,* and deserve recognition for their place in that story. At worst, John Ringling North's compositions were pieces of show music that merely accompanied movement and action. At best, they elevated and supported an incredible array of animal and human artists that offered all people an escape into the colorful world of the circus. BW

Endnotes

1. Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus Magazine & Program, 1950
2. Famous Music Corporation, New York, 1951
3. Lyrics transcribed by David SaLoutos from sound recordings in the Robert McDougal collection, Robert L. Parkinson Library & Research Center, Circus World Museum
4. Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus Magazine & Program, 1952
5. Ibid.
6. Lyrics transcribed by David SaLoutos, op. cit.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid.
9. Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus Magazine & Program, 1953
10. Lyrics transcribed by David SaLoutos, op. cit.
11. Ibid.
12. Ringing Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus Magazine & Program, 1953
13. Ibid.
14. Lyrics from unpublished music manuscript in the Merle Evans collection, Robert L. Parkinson Library & Research Center, Circus World Museum
15. Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus Magazine & Program, 1954
16. Lyrics from unpublished music manuscript in the Merle Evans collection, op. cit.
17. Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus Magazine & Program, 1954
18. Ibid.
19. Announcement transcribed by David SaLoutos, from sound recordings in the Robert McDougal collection, Robert L. Parkinson Library & Research Center, Circus World Museum
20. Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus Magazine & Program, 1954
21. Lyrics transcribed by David SaLoutos, op. cit.
22. Lyrics from Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus Magazine & Program, 1955
23. Ibid.
24. Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus Magazine & Program, 1955
25. Announcement transcribed by David SaLoutos, op.cit.
26. Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus Magazine & Program, 1955
27. Ibid.
28. Lyrics transcribed by David SaLoutos, op. cit.
29. Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus Magazine & Program, 1955

about the author...

Baraboo native David SaLoutos has a life-long love of circus and music. With 42 years in the performing arts, he is best known for 28 years as Circus World's singing ringmaster. Joining the Circus World staff in 1986, Dave helped organize and stage The Great Circus Parade, train, and big top circus performances. He also plays a collection of antique circus instruments which has included the Ringling Bros. Bell wagon and the America Steam Calliope.

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Circus Historical Society

2018 Annual Convention

On July 18-21, 2018, the Circus Historical Society will convene its national convention in Baraboo. Convention check-in commences at noon Wednesday July 18 in the Clarion Hotel lobby, continuing through 5:00 P.M. Late arrivals can also garner their registration packets on the following day. Plan to arrive early to take advantage of included arrival-day afternoon activities. A separate, additional charge will be incurred at registration time for the historic circus homes tour.

The abundant circus history, heritage and legacy present in Baraboo will be celebrated over a span of four days. The heart of the assembly will be four sessions of presentations on Thursday and Friday July 19 and 20. One will focus on local and Wisconsin circus history. Another will be on women of the circus, with a largely female slate of presenters. Two panel discussions are currently being planned, one whereby managers of the largest publicly-accessible collections will make attendees aware of the latest developments and acquisitions.

Local flavor features include a special tour of the recently restored and truly resplendent Al. Ringling Theatre, America's oldest and among the most elegant of motion picture palaces. A tour of multiple circus proprietor homes, several never before available to public access, is being arranged. Registrants can also take part in a tour of the local cemetery, using a recently produced guidebook.

Registrants will receive a ticket to Circus World Museum that will serve as an entry pass to the world-class attraction throughout the duration of the event. The Thursday July 19 Baraboo Concert on the Square will feature a rain or shine performance by Prof. Gerald Stich's Circus Band.

The annual convention program and banquet will be held on Friday evening July 20, the agenda including special recognitions, the much-anticipated awarding of the annual Stuart Thayer Prize and a very special guest speaker.

Baraboo's Big Top Circus Parade & Circus Celebration will roll through the streets on Saturday morning July 21 starting at 11:00 A.M. The middle of the day is at will, time to visit the museum, for fellowship, or to take advantage of other local attractions. The annual CHS Benefit Auction, a rollicking happy event with rare and unusual gems at bargain prices, will take place on Saturday evening.

Members and others desiring to donate materials for sale at the auction can bring them to the registration table or transfer them after arrival. Those planning to ship parcels of auction items in advance, are requested to first send a notice to <circushistoricalsociety@gmail.com>.

CHS conventions are enriching and engaging events. Enjoy the one in 2018 even more by your participation in the program or by volunteering to serve in the daily operations. Assistance is always welcome.

Address all convention questions, assistance or special requests to <circushistoricalsociety@gmail.com> or call 608-356-1030 during normal business hours (CST).

Those registrants desiring to accomplish research at the Circus World Museum Library are urged to make their own arrangements directly with Pete Shrake, Archivist, at 608-356-8341 or <pshrake@circusworldmuseum.com>. Pete is wearing several hats during convention time and library hours will be truncated from normal operations.

Hotel

Book your reservation now at the Clarion Hotel; 626 West Pine Street; Baraboo, Wisconsin 53913. Telephone 608-356-6422. With two queen-size beds per room, the rate is $129.00 per night ($143.84 total with fees and taxes). Reservations should be made directly with the hotel (not through the Clarion website or reservation center). Tell the reservation desk that you request the Circus Historical Society room block to receive the specified rate. Room reservation cut-off date is June 1. Rooms are limited, immediate reservations are recommended.

Late breaking news

Christian Overland, the new Ruth & Hartley Barker Director at the Wisconsin Historical Society, has accepted an invitation to be the keynote speaker at the banquet on Friday July 20th. Coming from the famed Henry Ford in Dearborn, Michigan, Overland arrived just as the WHS commences a more direct role in the management of Circus World Museum.

In addition to the other activities and provided meals, a special reception at Circus World Museum with a lavish meal will be provided free to all registrants on Wednesday, July 18. Be sure to arrive early to partake of this outstanding event that will include special music and viewing opportunities!

Address all convention questions, assistance or special requests to <circushistoricalsociety@gmail.com>.

The full convention information text and the Registration Form can also be found online at <www.circushistory.org>. Check there periodically for updates.

Circus Historical Society Annual Convention
July 18-21, 2018 Baraboo Wisconsin
Registration Form

Name_____

Guest(s)_____

Street Address_____

City_____ **State/Prov.**_____ **Postal Code**_____

Country_____

Home phone_____**Cell phone**_____ **Email**_____

Registration fees [Member or guest(s)]	**$130.00 each**	**#**_____	**$**_____
Registration fees [Non-member]	**$190.00 each**	**#**_____	**$**_____

Registration fees include a Circus World Museum pass good all days and a tour of the Circus World Museum library

Late Registration Fees

After June 18 and before July 8	**$50.00**	**#**_____	**$**_____
On or after July 9	**$75.00**	**#**_____	**$**_____

Al. Ringling Theatre tour ticket(s)	**$15.00**	**#**_____	**$**_____
Extra banquet ticket(s)	**$30.00**	**#**_____	**$**_____

TOTAL (*check or money order payable in US dollars to Circus Historical Society*) **$**_____

Special dietary needs? None [ ] Gluten free [ ] Kosher [ ] Vegetarian [ ] Other [ ] Specify_____

Cancellation Policy

Cancellation request submitted before June 18, full refund.
Cancellation request submitted after June 18, full refund less $25.00 processing fee.
Cancellation requests submitted after July 9 or no show, NO REFUND.

Questions? Assistance?

Address all convention questions, assistance or special requests to:
circushistoricalsociety@gmail.com

Mail completed registration form, with check or money order:

Circus Historical Society
c/o Robert Cline
2707 Zoar Road
Cheraw, SC 29520-4133